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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A Comparative History of Caribbean Poetry in English, French, and Spanish

by

Katie Yvonne Jones

(C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1986

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled A Comparative History of Caribbean Poetry in English, French, and Spanish

submitted by Katie Yvonne Jones in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

(Supervisor)

Robert J. Thornberry

Date: September 25, 1986

Dedication

To my parents, Gwyneth and Derek Jones,
and to the memory of my grandmother,
Catherine Olive Davies.

Abstract

This is a comparative study of the development of English, French, and Spanish Caribbean poetry from 1492 to the present. It regards the Caribbean as a distinct literary zone, and demonstrates the similarity in the patterns of literary evolution among the various countries, despite linguistic and political barriers. It suggests that Caribbean literature functioned as a defective and dependent sub-system lying on the periphery of the European polysystem until the present century. Early expatriate, Neoclassical and Romantic literature is described, highlighting cross-linguistic similarities and the general mimicry of European models. The indigenous experience found expression, meanwhile, in a lively oral tradition.

The rejection of European models in scribal literature began at the turn of the nineteenth century, when hispanic modernismo became the first of many avant garde literary movements. This century has witnessed the coming of age of Caribbean poetry, after the rediscovery of the African heritage in négritude, which led to political and social protest poetry, and culminated in the new orality of contemporary verse. Despite the current vitality of Caribbean literature, much remains to be done in literary criticism and literary history; this study stands alone in the field of comparative Caribbean literary history.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Stephen Arnold, who first introduced me to the field of Caribbean literature, and who has given me inspiration and guidance throughout this project. Many thanks are due also to Professor Milan Dimić, who provided me with invaluable suggestions and detailed criticism, as well as offering the benefits of his great erudition and common sense.

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I. Chapter 1: Introduction

Fragmentation is a geographical and historical, as well as a literary, phenomenon in the Caribbean area. As Barbara Howes observes in the introduction to her anthology, From the Green Antilles, "island psychology...is the core of Caribbean literature."[1] These islands, having been ruled for centuries by different European powers antagonistic to one another, have developed in relative isolation and mutual distrust. The main linguistic groups in the area, speaking Spanish, English, French, and assorted creole tongues, have historically regarded one another with suspicion and hostility. This "ghettoization" is suggested even in the different names which the three groups give to the area, as Jean-Claude Bajeux points out in his Antilia Retrouvée[2] : in Spanish, it is usually "el Caribe," in French "les Antilles," and in English "the West Indies." The Jamaican poet, John Figueroa, reminds us that "ignoring hurts"[3]: this mutual ignorance has certainly been detrimental to Caribbean literary criticism. The tendency has been for a scholar to examine exclusively the literary production of one island or of one linguistic grouping; Bajeux describes the tendency

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[1] Barbara Howes, ed., From the Green Antilles: Writings of the Caribbean (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1966) xi.
[2] Jean-Claude Bajeux, Antilia Retrouvée: Claude McKay, Luis Palés Matos, Aimé Césaire, poètes noirs antillais (Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1983).
[3] John Figueroa, Ignoring Hurts: Poems (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1976).

thus:

> Les critiques, en face des difficultés provoquées par la diversité des langues et des situations, se cantonnent, sauf exception, dans une sphère linguistique homogène et, maniant la synecdoque, parlent de littérature antillaise alors qu'ils n'embrassent en fait qu'une fraction de ce tout auquel ils se réfèrent.[4]

The influence of nationalism in the different European critical traditions must be regarded as partially responsible for this blinkered attitude.

Nevertheless, as many critics have observed in passing, the similarities in these territories' development, both historical and literary, are remarkable. The islands and the Guianas share a common history of colonisation, exploitation, slavery, plantation economics, miscegenation, and revolution, all of which are reflected in the themes and preoccupations of their poets. If the area's literary history, from the fifteenth century to the present, is viewed panoramically, the same broad patterns of development in form and content are discernible in each of the main language groupings, despite some chronological discrepancies.

Two images from the work of the Martinican poet, Aimé Césaire, show both his perception of Caribbean fragmentation

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[4] Jean-Claude Bajeux, Antilia Retrouvée, p. 6. Some examples of critical studies which are, despite their titles, limited to one linguistic group are: Lloyd W. Brown, West Indian Poetry (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1984), and Otto Olivera, Breve historia de la literatura antillana (Mexico City: Ediciones de Andrea, 1957). Interestingly, literary histories of the French-speaking Antilles almost always include the term "français" or "francophone" in their titles, indicating either the authors' greater precision or greater pride in their metropolitan connection.

and of the underlying similarity which unites the diverse islands, if only in suffering. In the Cahier d'un retour au pays natal Césaire describes the islands as "mauvais papier déchiré sur les eaux" and as "tronçons côté à côté fichés sur l'epée flambée du Soleil"[1]: they are separate fragments, yet they are united by the sea and the sun, which we might interpret freely not only as geography and meteorology, but also as history, politics, and economics.

It is my contention that there exists a Caribbean literary zone, whose literatures possess an overriding unity in diversity. This study will therefore constitute a challenge to the more traditional, insular approach to West Indian literary criticism, which tends to perpetuate the myth that Caribbean literatures have no relation at all to one another.

The concept of the literary zone is itself a problematic one.[2] Nevertheless, it is a useful term to designate an area which, despite physical and linguistic divisions, has distinct cultural, particularly literary, unity. The Caribbean has often been categorised as being a part of the Latin American literary zone, but this is highly debateable. Examination of the literary evidence shows that the Caribbean is a separate zone, exhibiting different

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[1] Aimé Césaire, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal/Return to my Native Land, trans. Émile Snyder (Paris: Éditions Présence Africaine, 1968), p. 118.

[2] For discussions of the concept see Neohelicon v. 1, nos. 1-2, 1973, pp. 115-149, and Actes du VIIe Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature, v. II, eds. Milan Dimić & Eva Kushner (Stuttgart, 1979), pp. 123-204.

literary characteristics. One example of this distinction is that "négritude," "negrista," and "black power" poetry has been extremely important and influential in the Caribbean, whereas it is relatively rare on the mainland (apart from the Guianas). Another instance of this difference is that the "magical realism" of Latin American novelists is not prevalent within the West Indies; although some writers' work, such as that of the Cuban, Alejo Carpentier, shares the characteristics of this movement (or style), most authors, such as V.S. Naipaul, Joseph Zobel, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, adopt a far less symbolic, more ironic style.

The advantages of designating the Caribbean a literary zone are twofold: to avoid the isolating tendency of much previous scholarship in the field, and to prevent the area's literatures from being unceremoniously lumped together with larger zones, such as Latin America. However, I do regard this zone as part of a larger whole: Caribbean literature forms a part of both the European- and the African-derived tradition, and continues to contribute to the macro "polysystem" of literature.

The polysystem theory' is particularly useful in the description of West Indian literature, which can be seen as

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'For a full account of this theory see the writings of Itamar Even-Zohar, its originator, particularly "Polysystem Theory" in Poetics Today 1: 1-2 (1979), 287-310, and his Papers in Historical Poetics (Tel Aviv University, 1978), as well as Dmitri Segal's admirable summary, "Israeli Contributions to Literary Theory" in Schwerpunkte der Literaturwissenschaft, ed. Elrud Ibsch (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982) pp. 261-292.

a set of emerging, initially dependent sub-systems of larger polysystems (those of English, French, and Spanish literature, respectively). As this study will reveal, by tracing their evolution, these dependent sub-systems, through conversions, innovations, and the establishment of canons, gradually become a relatively independent polysystem in themselves. The changes which constitute the evolution can be explained in terms of a continuing dynamic displacement of the secondary (established, conservative) paradigm from the centre of the canon by new primary (innovative, experimental) paradigms, often derived from contacts with various source literatures. Moreover, most West Indian countries have a <u>symbiotic</u> language situation (as in the case of Hebrew and Yiddish literatures, which the polysystem theory was initially formulated to explain), in that they possess at least two languages: standard and creole, used for different literary purposes. (In the past, creole has tended to be used in oral literature, standard language in written literature, but this rule has been increasingly broken in recent years.) The history of Caribbean literature shows that it has for centuries languished on the periphery of a dominant polysystem (European literature), but in the present century it has drawn ever closer to the centre, or "into the mainstream" in the words of one Latin American critic, though by no means "mainstream" in the sense of conforming to an old, secondary paradigm. Today, even non-canonized, oral literature is

moving towards canonicity.

It has been argued[1] that since Russian Formalism and its subsequent developments discredited the traditional, biographically-oriented approach, literary history has virtually ceased to be written. Since both text-oriented and reader-oriented histories are fraught with dangers of gross distortion and misinterpretation, and are moreover incapable of explaining the critical issues, such as "the change of norm systems" (in Douwe W. Fokkema's words), the literary historian must adopt a diachronic, systematic approach which eschews traditional value judgements and avoids the pitfalls of biography, static formalism, and idiosyncratic interpretation. The polysystem theory seems to offer a promising framework for an endeavour of this kind.

In his essay "Nationalism, Internationalism, Periodisation and Commonwealth Literature," Bruce King concludes that:

> There are two histories to each national literature -- a national chronology set in a local cultural context and an international, comparative history in which a local English literature is seen as part of international English-speaking culture.[2]

As an illustration of the difficulty of defining authors either in a national or in an international context, King

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[1]For instance, by Douwe W. Fokkema in his Literary History, Modernism, and Postmodernism (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Johns Benjamins Pub. Co., 1984). Fokkema's solution to the impasse also involves the consideration of literature as a system, but uses the concept of successive "sociocodes" to explain literary change.

[2]Dieter Riemenschneider, ed., The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1983) 14.

cites the work of the Barbadian poet, Edward Brathwaite, which owes something to both T. S. Eliot and to Aimé Césaire, not to mention its heavy debt to African culture. The Cuban poet, Nicolás Guillén, would also be a good example of a writer whose work belongs both to a European movement (the primitivism and surrealism associated with Federico García Lorca, Luis Buñuel, and other Spaniards) and to an indigenous trend (Cuban folk music, dance, and song). This example indicates that King's argument holds true for other post-colonial literatures in addition to English. The critic's task, then, is to choose which history to write: there is no one definitive literary history, but a series of histories, spreading out from the centre like ripples from a stone thrown into a pool. This study of the main trends in the development of English, French, and Spanish Caribbean poetry is a contribution to comparative literary history, a type of scholarship which has achieved a great deal in the field of European literature, but which is relatively new in that of the Third World.

II. Chapter Two: Caribbean Literary History and Criticism

Traditional literary history has tended to present its subject matter as a series of facts or unalterable objects: "monuments of unageing intellect,"[10] in W. B. Yeats' words. Moreover, the literary historian was faced with the task of uniting an approach of unimpeachable objectivity with a selective process displaying impeccable good taste. In other words, the scholar, under a pretence of scientific impartiality, would include in his history only "great works" of the past, occupying a central position in the literary canon. In more recent years, following the Russian Formalists and Roland Barthes, literary history of this type has fallen into disrepute, although the new theorists have been slow to put into practice the paradigms they proposed to replace the old ones. Basically, the new approaches to literary history call into doubt both the objectivity of the scholar and the exclusivity of the canon. Many theorists, building on Barthes' "re-humanization" of literary scholarship, concentrate upon the role of the reader and upon the dynamic nature of literary discourse. Other theorists, notably those of the aforementioned "polysystemic" school, have concentrated upon the

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[10]W. B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," The Norton Introduction to Literature, Carl E. Bain, et al, eds. (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1981), p. 824. This anthology is itself an example of the "series of great works" approach to literary history.

unreliability of the unacknowledged value judgements used by traditional literary historians. Eschewing the study of "great works" alone, these scholars draw our attention to neglected or peripheral areas and genres, such as translated literature, detective fiction, pornography, etcetera. The claim is that such works often, in fact, reveal the mechanisms underlying the literary polysystem better than "mainstream" or canonical works.

In the present study, poems have been selected primarily for their aptness in illustrating the dominant trends, themes, forms, images, language registers, etc., of any given period of Caribbean literature. Since the field surveyed is extensive, there are many inevitable omissions; however, the poets who are included do give a fair representation of the general lines of development. I have concentrated also on periods when radical changes, or primary paradigms, appear in these literatures, so that innovative works of such periods are accorded more attention than the many imitative or epigonal works of moribund secondary paradigms. Nevertheless, I have tried to avoid making the kind of value judgements which exclude "bad" poetry and exalt the "good"; such a process of selection would undoubtedly have falsified the total picture of literary development.

Thus, for example, I include Grainger's Sugar Cane, which is a "bad" poem from almost all the usual aesthetic points of view, yet which is illustrative both of an

important genre and of the dominant "spirit of the age." Conversely, Heredia's "A Niágara," a "good" poem, from the centre of the Cuban literary canon, is also discussed, not merely because it is a monument, but because it epitomizes diverse aspects of Caribbean Romanticism. In other cases, where several poets' work could have been used with equal validity to illustrate a particular literary trait, I make no excuse for having indulged personal preference.

The current state of comparative Caribbean literary history can be described quite simply: it does not exist. The present study is therefore a tentative first step towards an ideal of a complete, all-genre comparative history of the region's letters. Nevertheless, there do exist some excellent literary histories confined to the literary production of one language group. In his pioneering essay, "Problèmes methodologiques d'une 'histoire littéraire' des Caraïbes," Jack Corzani makes the useful distinction between "histoire littéraire" and "histoire de la littérature,"[11] remarking that the latter do exist in Caribbean literary historiography, but that there have been few attempts at the former. He cites Pradel Pompilus' history of Haitian literature[12] as an example of an "histoire de la littérature": this work constitutes a collection of descriptions of the lives and works of Haitian

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[11] Jack Corzani, "Problèmes methodologiques d'une 'histoire littéraire' des Caraïbes," Komparatistische Hefte, Heft 11 (1985), p. 56.

[12] Pradel Pompilus & Raphaël Berrou, Histoire de la littérature haïtienne illustrée par les textes, 2 vols. (Port-au-Prince: Eds. Caraïbes, 1965).

authors, arranged in chronological order, but with no attempt to link them together. Its usefulness is as a somewhat unreliable reference work, but it offers no analysis or synthesis of Haitian literature as a whole. There are many such works extant in both hispanic and francophone Antillean literature, often used as school text books, while the anglophone islands have lacked even these inadequate "histories of literature" until very recently.

One of the earliest attempts at a serious "literary history" of the Caribbean, in combination with other francophone countries outside France, was Auguste Viatte's Histoire littéraire de l'Amérique française[1], published in 1954. Despite the fact that the Frenchman, Viatte, deserves praise for tackling a hitherto almost wholly neglected area, it must be admitted that the Histoire leaves a great deal to be desired. His purpose was to make "l'inventaire de la culture française hors de France," [2] and this immediately indicates the main flaw in his approach: he regards the countries he studies (including the Antilles and Canada) as mere satellites of France, and judges their literary production according to its conformity with metropolitan ideals. The indignant Corzani speaks of Viatte's attitude of "paternalisme injurieux"[3] and calls for a "decolonization" of Caribbean literary history. To do justice to Viatte, one

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[1] Auguste Viatte, Histoire littéraire de l'Amérique française (Paris: P. U. F., 1954).
[2] Quoted by Jack Corzani in his "Problèmes methodologiques d'une 'histoire littéraire' des Caraïbes," p. 53.
[3] ibid. p. 53.

must add that he has attempted to "decolonise" his own work. In his much more recent Histoire comparée des littératures francophones'' there remains hardly a trace of an imperialistic attitude, though the comparative approach is often somewhat strained, since countries as diverse as Algeria, Canada, Egypt, Haiti, and Switzerland are forcibly brought together.

Like Viatte, many of the early literary historians, anthologists, and critics of Caribbean literature were not natives of the area. In this, the Caribbean is similar to mainland Latin America, where, Beatriz González informs us: "it was left to foreigners to be first to write literary histories of a global character."'' In the Caribbean, Edna Underwood, an American, produced one of the first anthologies of Haitian poetry as early as 1934. '' G. R. Coulthard, the pioneering comparatist, who published his Raza y color en la literatura antillana in 1952, was an Englishman. The hispanic Indies have been rather more fortunate in producing native-born critics early in the century. The most comprehensive literary history so far of the Spanish-speaking islands was, however, written by Otto Olivera, of the University of Syracuse, and published in

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''Auguste Viatte, Histoire comparée des littératures francophones (Poitiers: Fernand Nathan, 1980).

''Beatriz González, "Problems and Tasks of Latin American Literary Historiography (The Continental and National Literary Histories)," Neohelicon, vol. X (1985), p. 276. According to González, the first continental literary history was written by the North American, Alfred Coester, in 1916.

''Edna Underwood, ed., The Poets of Haiti (1782-1934) (Portland, Maine: Mosher Press, 1934).

1957. [19] A similar situation obtained with regard to purely historical texts until fairly recently; according to Eric Williams, Caribbean history books were "a product of metropolitan scholarship that has been fragmented, irregular, sporadic, and often pathetically inaccurate and prejudiced."[20] If one thinks of English historians, such as Edward Long and Anthony Froude, Williams' criticisms certainly seem justified; nevertheless, Williams himself, as a politician, is hardly an entirely trustworthy historian.

The 1970s was the period when anglophone and francophone Caribbean literary criticism and literary history ceased finally to be the realm of a few, perhaps eccentric, foreign scholars. The publication of the Guyanese, Ivan Van Sertima's Caribbean Writers: Critical Essays in 1968, followed by the Jamaican, Edward Baugh's 1971 pamphlet, West Indian Poetry 1900-1970: A Study in Cultural Decolonisation, marked the beginning of a surge of critical writings by native-born scholars, such as Kenneth Ramchand, Gordon Rohlehr, Keith Warner, and Edward Brathwaite. The BBC radio programme, "Caribbean Voices," together with small literary magazines, such as the Barbadian Bim, helped to foster this new trend of literary self-analysis during the 1960s and 70s. Moreover, novelists

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[19]Otto Olivera, Breve historia de la literatura antillana (Mexico: Studium, 1957).

[20]Quoted in Wolfgang Bader, "Tradition et décolonisation: fonction et image de la révoution haïtienne dans la littérature des Caraïbes après la seconde guerre mondiale," Actes du Xe Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (New York: Garland, 1985), p. 235.

like V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming, and Samuel Selvon, were achieving international acclaim and repute, so that Caribbean literary criticism and historiography began to be viewed as legitimate scholarly activities in the various colleges of the University of the West Indies. Nevertheless, the anglophone territories have so far failed to produce a comprehensive literary history, though literary criticism is improving steadily[21] and is also branching out into the neglected field of oral literature.[22] The francophone islands have been more fortunate in having their literary historians, notably Auguste Joyau[23] and Jack Corzani.[24] The latter's invaluable six-volume history, published in 1978, constitutes a radical break away from all previous, more or less pedestrian, "histoires de la littérature." Corzani documents and analyses admirably, although the study does tend towards the atomistic in its short chapters covering multifarious aspects of francophone Antillean literature.

The hispanic islands have enjoyed a relatively long history of literary criticism and historiography, although scholars have tended to confine their attentions to only one

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[21]To test this assertion one has only to compare, for instance, Lloyd Brown's 1982 study, West Indian Poetry, with Van Sertima's 1968 Caribbean Writers. Brown's criticism is far more scholarly and rigorous in comparison with Van Sertima's rather sketchy impressionism.

[22]See, for example, Mervyn Morris's article, "On Reading Louise Bennett, Seriously," Keith Warner's study of the calypso, and Edward Brathwaite's exploration of "nation language" literature.

[23]Auguste Joyau, Panorama de la littérature à la Martinique, 2 vols. (Morne Rouge, Martinique: Eds. des Caraïbes, 1974).

[24]Jack Corzani, La littérature des Antilles - Guyane françaises. 6 vols. (Fort-de-France: Desormeaux, 1978).

island. Thus, there are very many histories of Cuban literature, including Raimundo Lazo's succinct Historia de la literatura cubana[25], but very few studies including Puerto Rican and Dominican literature as well. After Olivera's seminal Historia of 1957, only Leslie Wilson's 1981 La poesía afroantillana[26] treats all three islands equally. Again, Coulthard's Raza y color en la literatura antillana of 1952 remains virtually alone in the sphere of comparative criticism, including both hispanic and francophone literatures. Ian Smart's Central American Writers of West Indian Origin: A New Hispanic Literature of 1984 is more comparative in its approach, though obviously favouring the hispanic islands, while Jean-Claude Bajeux's Antilia Retrouvée[27] is a fully-fledged comparative study across linguistic barriers, of the three poets, Césaire, McKay, and Palés Matos. Nevertheless, these works are isolated examples in an increasingly voluminous sea of single-island and single-writer studies. Only a few anthologies and reference works, such as Melanthika[28] and Donald Herdeck's indispensable Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical-Critical Encyclopedia[29] cross the

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[25] Raimundo Lazo, Historia de la literatura cubana (Mexico: Textos Universitarios, 1974).
[26] Leslie Wilson, La poesía afroantillana (Miami: Universal, 1981).
[27] Jean-Claude Bajeux, Antilia Retrouvée: Claude McKay, Luis Palés Matos, Aimé Césaire, poètes noirs antillais (Paris: Eds. Caribéennes, 1983).
[28] Nick Toczek, et al, eds., Melanthika: An Anthology of Pan-Caribbean Writing (Bradford: L. W. M. Publications, 1977).
[29] Donald Herdeck, et al, eds., Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical-Critical Encyclopedia (Washington D. C.:

linguistic barriers.

Caribbean literary theory, meanwhile, still remains almost a contradiction in terms, since only in the mid-1980s has anything at all been produced in this field. Jack Corzani's aforementioned article, "Problèmes methodologiques d'une 'histoire littéraire' des Caraïbes" and Beatriz González's "Problems and Tasks of Latin American Literary Historiography" are the only articles I have been able to discover with direct pertinence to the Caribbean. However, some general works dealing with former colonies and the Commonwealth do bear upon this region, for instance, Dominique O. Mannoni's Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization[30] and Dieter Riemenschneider's The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature.[31] Most of these theoreticians deplore the impressionism and lack of scholarly thoroughness which has characterized much of Caribbean criticism to date, and call for both a "decolonization" of critical attitudes and a rejection of provincialism.

The organization of material in any literary history presents manifold problems. Having rejected the rigid compartmentalization of many "histories of literature," I attempted to organize my study according to thematic principles, but remaining with a general chronological

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[29](cont'd) Three Continents Press, 1979).
[30]D. O. Mannoni, Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization (New York: Praeger, 1956).
[31]Dieter Riemenschneider, ed., The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1983).

sequence. However, I realized that the thematic categories continually overlapped, that the same poets would be discussed in several chapters, leaving one with no sense of their overall contribution, and that the whole approach went counter to a broad analysis of movements and literary change. In sum, as Beatriz González observes, "the use of the thematic criterion reinforces reductionism, besides being charged with an ahistorical sense."[32] Instead, I chose to adopt a loosely chronological approach, within the framework of the polysystemic theory of literature, dividing the material into periods when it appeared that there was a significant changeover between primary and secondary paradigms within the system. I have tried to avoid imposing European literary periodization upon Caribbean literature, although in the case of "Neoclassical" and "Romantic" eras, the terminology seemed apt because European models were at that time dominant. Moreover, I have attempted to show inter-relations among the various periods, and not present them as a "series of water-tight compartments."[33]

A further problem faced by the literary historian is that of the selection of countries to be discussed. In many histories of continental Latin American literature, for example, Brazil is tacitly omitted, apparently on the basis that Spanish is not its language. On the other hand, Cuba is often included in such histories, although it does not form part of the continental bloc. Beatriz González laments that:

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[32]ibid. p. 283.
[33]ibid. p. 282.

> Almost always, the non-Spanish speaking literatures and countries are discarded. With this, Brazil, Haiti, Puerto Rico, the Guyanas and the Dutch, French and British Antilles have been forgotten as components that also belong to the continentality."[34]

Strictly speaking, of course, the Antilles do not form part of the "continentality," but this is a common assumption among Latin American scholars, understandably eager to claim as much as possible as their own.

It is one of the basic assumptions of this study that the Caribbean region forms a separate literary zone from continental Latin America. The countries chosen for consideration are, therefore, all the islands of the Greater and Lesser Antilles, although, in practice, I concentrate upon the major ones, namely: Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe; Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados; and Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. I have, moreover, included poets from both Guyana and Guyane, although these countries are part of the mainland. My rationale for this selection is that the history of Guyanese literatures is remarkably similar in its evolution to that of the islands, whereas it differs radically from those of neighbouring Venezuela and Brazil. The Guyanas form part of the Caribbean literary zone by virtue of their common historical and cultural experiences, which manifest themselves in literatures with the same themes and preoccupations. A case could also be made for including the Caribbean coastal

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[34]ibid. p. 282.

regions of Central American countries in this study, but, by and large, specifically Caribbean influences and themes have occurred in these literatures only very recently.[33] The major omission from this history is that of the Dutch-speaking areas of the Caribbean, including Surinam and the island of Curaçao. Although I certainly regard these regions as constituent parts of the zone, I exclude them because literary development has taken place virtually only in the present century, texts are relatively few and largely unobtainable, and my learning the three main languages of the regions -- Dutch, Papiamento, and Sranan-Tongo -- would have delayed this project for several years, a possibility to be deplored, considering the present dearth of any comparative literary histories of the area.

Although the polysystem theory refers to "peripheral" systems, and I have chosen to regard Caribbean literatures as functioning as a peripheral system until the present century, this terminology should not be taken as a value judgement. Corzani rails against such terms as "marginal" or "diaspora," since he regards them as "expressions réductrices, subtilement infériorisantes."[34] In his otherwise excellent article, Corzani displays the chip on his shoulder when he discusses Eurocentric views of the Caribbean, particularly in his angry denunciation of Auguste

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[33]For an account of the literature of these areas, see Ian Smart's Central American Writers of West Indian Origin: A New Hispanic Literature (Washington D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1984).
[34]ibid. p. 53.

Viatte who, if nothing else, was a pioneer of Caribbean literary history. Corzani insists, with Edouard Glissant, that "notre Centre il est en nous."[37] That the realm of Caribbean literary scholarship needs "decolonizing," as Corzani puts it, is undeniable, but in any literary history of the area, it must be acknowledged that "decolonization" of the literature itself was tardy in its development.

Despite his indignation before Viatte's paternalistic, if not to say patronizing, attitude, Corzani does not deny that a non-Antillean might be equipped to write a Caribbean literary history, since "ni l'indigène ni l'étranger ne sont a priori favorisés."[38] In fact, many of the most admirable works on Caribbean literature have been written by outsiders,[39] but it is a promising sign that, most recently, native West Indians have produced excellent studies of their own literature, especially in the anglophone territories. [40] Nevertheless, the field is still open to "l'étranger," like myself, and the forthcoming International Comparative Literature Association's volume on the Caribbean in the History of Literatures in European Languages series will be a collaboration of "l'indigène et l'étranger," the optimum situation, according to Corzani. Meanwhile, I place my trust in a comparatist approach, an unimperialistic attitude, and

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[37] ibid. p. 54.
[38] ibid. p. 56.
[39] Examples include works by A. James Arnold, G. R. Coulthard, Lilyan Kesteloot, Ned Thomas, Leslie Wilson, and so on.
[40] Edward Baugh's study of Derek Walcott's Another Life, for example.

in Barthes' dictum: "L'Histoire est hystérique: elle ne se constitue que si on la regarde -- et pour la regarder, il faut en être exclu."[4]

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[4]Roland Barthes, La chambre claire: note sur la photographie (Paris: L'Étoile, Gallimard & Seuil, 1980), p. 102.

III. Chapter Three: Caribbean Literature 1492-1800

The literature of the Caribbean before 1492 is, and must always remain, a mystery. The native peoples of the area, including the Tainos, the Arawaks, and the Caribs, apparently had no written literature, while the genocide perpetrated upon them by the European colonisers destroyed their oral literature. As Parry and Sherlock point out in their seminal work, A Short History of the West Indies, "Columbus did not discover a New World; he established contact between two worlds, both already old..."[42] Yet, the European newcomers wanted not contact but conquest, and their aggression proved too strong for the native Indians to resist. Thus, today, "the peoples of the West Indies, with a dwindling handful of exceptions, migrated or were deliberately transplanted from the Old World."[43] Of the earliest, truly indigenous literature of the area, then, nothing can be said.

Each West Indian territory's post-Columbian literary history begins with the writings of European expatriates, who record their impressions of the "New World." This cannot be described as West Indian literature; it is literature written in and about the West Indies, from an outsider's

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[42] J.H. Parry & P.M. Sherlock, A Short History of the West Indies (London: Macmillan, 1963) p. 1.
[43] ibid., Introduction, v. The "dwindling handful of exceptions" refers to a small number of surviving Caribs on the island of Dominica.

point of view. Nevertheless, this kind of writing is significant in the development of native Caribbean literatures because the outsider's view was often adopted by the earliest native writers.

Columbus himself was the first commentator on his "discovery." He wrote to the King from Cuba: "Sire, these countries far surpass all the rest of the world in beauty and conveniency."[44] In this simple sentence we see a response which was to be pervasive in subsequent West Indian writing: the "exotic" response. The civilised stranger is awed by a lush, unfamiliar landscape, and describes it as "exotic"[45]: a mysterious, fantastic land which bears a resemblance to the mythical earthly paradise. This response from a European newcomer, especially one eager to "sell" his own discovery and convinced of the existence of El Dorado, is understandable, but the response was later duplicated by the first "mimic men," the native writers, alienated by the European culture imposed upon them, who falsified their true identities.

The earliest examples of expatriate writing naturally come from the Spanish islands, since the Spaniards were the first colonisers. Moreover, all the very earliest texts are prose accounts, journals and histories (albeit laced with fiction, quite often). Thus, in this chapter, I shall discuss prose literature, as well as poetry, although

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[44] Quoted in Parry & Sherlock, p. 3.
[45] See René Ménil, "Sur l'exotisme colonial," Nouvelle Critique, May, 1959, p. 139.

subsequent chapters will focus almost exclusively upon poetry. Although French and English works of this kind did not appear for a century or more, the chronological discrepancy does not affect the similarity of the pattern. Columbus's own journal has been lost, but a detailed abstract of its contents by Bartolomé de Las Casas still exists. The journal gives us a picture of a contradictory personality, of a man who can appreciate the beauty and intelligence of the Indians, yet who can view them only as good material for enslavement. Throughout the journal there reverberates the word 'gold'; Columbus's dismissal of the islands in favour of the mainland gold mines foreshadows the neglect they were to suffer in succeeding ages:

> "...all these islands...are extremely verdant and fertile, with the air very mild, and probably contain things of which I am ignorant, not inclining to stay here, but discover and visit other islands in search of gold."[1]

Columbus himself is by no means the only commentator on the new-found islands. Several "Histories of the Indies" were written by the new Spanish colonisers, many of whom were missionaries. Two readable examples are Historia natural y moral de las Indias by Padre José de Acosta (1590) and Historia general y natural de las Indias by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1535), but by far the most famous work of the age is Bartolomé de Las Casas's Tratado de la destruyción (sic) de las Indias (1541).

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[1] A.W.Lawrence & Jean Young, eds., Narratives of the Discovery of America (New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, 1931) p. 105.

Las Casas was a native of Seville, who came to the New World in 1502 to preach. His missionary zeal among the Indians ~~was~~ well rewarded, and he came to admire the 'idolaters' whom he converted; meanwhile, he became disgusted and outraged by his fellow Spaniards' cruel treatment of the Indians. He vented his outrage in the Tratado, which is a vehement condemnation of the Spanish conquistadors and their descendants:

> And of all the universe of humanity, these people (the Indians) are the most guileless, the most devoid of wickedness and duplicity, ...the most humble, patient, and peaceable, holding no grudges, ...the most devoid of rancors, hatreds or desire for vengeance of any people in the world....Yet into this sheepfold, into this land of meek outcasts there came some Spaniards who immediately behaved like ravening wild beasts, wolves, tigers, or lions that had been starved for many days. And Spaniards have behaved in no other way for the past forty years, down to the present time...[1]

Las Casas travelled to Spain to put his case for the protection of the Indians, and he became a celebrated campaigner whose works temporarily improved the Indians' lot.

The testimony of Las Casas and other Spanish priests, together with an influential eighteenth century French work by Guillaume Raynal[2] and English travellers' accounts have contributed to what the Spanish call the "leyenda negra" of their cruelty and inhumanity in the conquest of the New

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[1] Bartolomé de Las Casas, The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account, trans. Herma Briffault. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974) pp. 38-39.

[2] Guillaume Thomas Françoise Raynal, Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Europeens dans les deux Indes (Avignon, 1786).

World. Many Spaniards have denied these accusations; one interesting refutation is formulated by Manuel Ballesteros in the prologue to his anthology, Escritores de Indias.[39] Ballesteros's refutation is based on three arguments, viz.: a. that the Spanish conquistadors were much better behaved than their "Anglo-Saxon" counterparts, b. that "only" the indigenous population of the Antilles was destroyed, not that of the whole of Central and South America, and c. that the contemporary detractors of Spain in South America itself are the descendants of the original colonisers, and are therefore traitors. Ballesteros's patriotic and ludicrous disavowal is by no means unusual; some Spanish, English, and French historians, even in the twentieth century, claim that their own countrymen's behaviour in the New World was unimpeachable, while the other two nations were the true culprits. The truth is, one suspects, that no coloniser is guiltless.

In the English West Indies, the first commentator is the Elizabethan courtier and explorer, Sir Walter Raleigh, whose The Discoverie of the ... Beautiful Empyre of Guiana,[40] published in 1596, is a powerful work of fantasy masquerading as a travelogue, describing Guiana as a paradisical empire, the home of El Dorado. Although

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[39] Manuel Ballesteros, ed., Escritores de Indias (Zaragoza: Editorial Ebro, 1955) vol.I, pp.9-12.

[40] Sir Walter Ralegh, The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empyre of Guiana, with a relation of the great and Golden Citie of Manoa (which the Spanyards call El Dorado) And of the Provinces of Emeria, Arromaia, Amapaia and other Countries, with their rivers, adioyning (London: Robert Robinson, 1596).

Raleigh's account has greater literary pretensions than those of his Spanish counterparts, it shares with them a supercilious, patronizing attitude towards the native Indians and an overwhelming lust for gold. He devotes several pages to a description of Amazon women who, he claims, are a ferocious, all-female tribe who mate only once a year with neighbouring male tribes, keep the female progeny and return the male children to their fathers.[5] Presumably to add authenticity to his tale, he claims that one part of the legend, viz. their having only one breast each, is false. The rest of the narrative contains vituperation against the Spaniards and accounts of the native tribes' customs (a blend of truth and fantasy), together with hearsay about the fabulous wealth of El Dorado which, despite the book's title, Raleigh admits he did not manage to discover. The book was a bestseller in its time, and was translated into several European languages, including Latin; it must have contributed greatly to the exotic image of the Indies already implanted in the European mind.

At this stage of European reaction to the New World, the inhabitants of that other world are still fantastical creatures, "objects" rather than "subjects." The Guyanan poet and critic, Arthur Seymour, aptly describes this attitude when he says:

> Martin Buber...tells us that life is really a matter of meeting, when 'I' and 'thou' come together on a

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[5] ibid. pp. 23-4.

> basis of equality as individuals, and he cautions us against the heresy of looking upon the world as an 'I' and 'It' grouping when we debase our fellow human beings and look upon them as Objects rather than Subjects in their own right - as Objects which are customers for our goods, servants in our economy, as colonials in our empire... The great and significant movement in any sketch for a literary history of Guyana (and, we might add, for the West Indies as a whole) will be the movement from that of being Objects described by others from outside the region to that of the stage when the people of the region themselves begin to talk and write about themselves as Subjects and the centre of their own enquiry.[52]

Raleigh's Discoverie is an attempt to persuade Queen Elizabeth I to stake an English claim in Guiana before the Spaniards succeed in extracting all of South America's gold. What in fact happened was that the English and French instead produced skillful pirates, who allowed the Spanish to fetch the gold from Mexico and Peru, and then pilfered from their laden ships in the Caribbean Sea. An interesting account of a French "career" buccaneer's experiences is given in Le Sieur Ravenau de Lussan's Journal.[53] The French also produced their Antillean historians, counterparts of the Spanish Oviedo and Acosta; examples are Rochefort's Histoire[54] and Père Labat's famous Memoirs.[55]

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[52] A. J. Seymour, "A Mini-History of Literary Guyana," in Robert McDowell, Bibliography of Literature from Guyana (Arlington, Texas: Sable Publishing Co., 1975), pp. xiii-xiv.

[53] Le Sieur Ravenau de Lussan, A Journal of a Voyage made into the South Sea, by the Bucaniers (sic) or Freebooters of America (London, 1698).

[54] César de Rochefort, Histoire naturelle et morale des îles Antilles de l'Amerique, avec un vocabulaire caraïbe (Rotterdam: A. Leers, 1658).

[55] Père Labat, The Memoirs of Père Labat 1693-1705, trans. John Eaden (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1970).

Britain, too, has had her famous, all too often notorious, chroniclers of the West Indies. James Anthony Froude, for example, sums up his account of the West Indies in these words:

> It is strange to think how chequered a history these islands have had, how far they are even yet from any condition which promises permanence...They were valued only for the wealth which they yielded, and society there has never assumed any particularly noble aspect. There has been splendour and luxurious living, and there have been crimes and horrors, and revolts and massacres. There has been romance, but it has been the romance of pirates and outlaws. The natural graces of human life do not show themselves under such conditions. There has been no saint in the West Indies since Las Casas, no hero unless philonegro enthusiasm can make one out of Toussaint. There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own.[1]

Froude's imperialistic survey of West Indian history is characteristic of many British eighteenth and nineteenth century accounts. Froude is often regarded by contemporary West Indians as a thoroughgoing villain, the epitome of arrogant colonialism, perhaps partly due to the influence of another work, J.J. Thomas's Froudacity: West Indian Fables by James Anthony Froude (1889), a brilliant refutation of Froude's theories by a native Trinidadian. However, it is often forgotten that most of Froude's condemnation was aimed at the British themselves, who allowed a lucrative outpost of Empire to fall into a state of neglect. Froude was undoubtedly a racist, but a relatively compassionate one for the age, and more particularly so in comparison with such as

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[1] James Anthony Froude, The English in the West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1888), pp. 346-7.

Edward Long, another British historian, who was a rabid imperialist and negrophobe (see the succeeding paragraphs on Francis Williams).

The discrepancy in time between the Spanish (sixteenth century), French (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), and English (mostly eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), histories of the West Indies naturally reflects the differing times of arrival of these three nationalities in the area, as well as the growing European involvement over the centuries. Nevertheless, the histories and travellers' accounts bear remarkable resemblances to one another, regardless of the nationality of the author. Each nation had its polemicists (Las Casas, Raynal, Froude), its autobiographers (Columbus, Ravenau de Lussan, Lady Nugent[57]), its historians and naturalists (Acosta, Düss[58], Long). Significantly, there was very little fiction or poetry produced in the English or French Indies, although it is true to say that many of the early "histories" are, in fact, pure fantasy (Raleigh's Discoverie is a good example).

The discovery of the Indies did inspire many European poets, even if they had never actually visited the New World. These poets were inevitably influenced by the exaggerated accounts of travellers and pirates, and their works contributed to the myth of the exotic paradise. One

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[57]Maria Nugent, Lady Nugent's Journal of her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805, ed. Philip Wright (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1966; original edition, 1839).
[58]Père Düss, Flore phanérogamique des Antilles françaises, 1897.

example is the poem "Bermudas" (c. 1653) by Andrew Marvell, which is probably based on Waller's mock-epic "The Battle of the Summer Islands"(1645)[9]; both poems catalogue the lush abundance of fruit and verdure on the islands, while Marvell's poem is explicitly devotional: these islands are seen as a paradise created by God.

A different British perspective on the islands is afforded by the epic poem The Sugar Cane (1764) by James Grainger, which is usually considered to be one of the first English poems actually written in the West Indies. Grainger was a Scottish doctor who practised for some time on the island of St. Kitts. If Marvell's version of the islands is idealised and metaphysical, because it is wholly imaginary, Grainger's is often bathetically realistic, despite its pastoral trappings, since it is based on his actual experience. Unfortunately for Grainger and his readers, he was inhibited by the poetic conventions of the age, as well as by his own lack of poetic talent, so that he felt obliged to convert material eminently suitable for a prose treatise into an epic poem. In Boswell's Life of Johnson, we read that Grainger's poem aroused great mirth when read aloud to the company assembled at Sir Joshua Reynold's house, particularly when "the poet began a new paragraph thus: 'Now, Muse, let's sing of rats...'"[10] The hapless Grainger

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[9]Andrew Marvell, The Complete Poems, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979), pp. 116-117 and 266.

[10]Alexander Chalmers, ed., The Works of the English Poets from Chaucer to Cowper, vol. XIV (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1971; facsimile of the original 1810 ed.), p. 472.

later changed "rats" to "whisker'd vermin breed," which sounds even more ludicrous today, but is characteristic of the age (cf. Pope's "scaly breed," meaning "fish"). Alexander Chalmers succinctly describes The Sugar-Cane's faults in his introduction:

> His invocations to his Muse are ...frequent and abrupt...The solemnity of these invocations excites expectation which generally ends in disappointment...His Muse sings of matters so new and uncouth to her, that it is impossible 'her heavenly plumes' should escape being 'soiled.' What Muse, indeed, could give a receipt for a compost of 'weeds, mould, dung, and stale,' or a lively description of the symptoms and cure of yaws, and preserve her elegance and purity?[11]

Grainger's interminable paragraphs of advice to planters about manuring the cane fields are quite incongruously couched in heroic language and pompous, archaic vocabulary. Above all, the poem everywhere reveals that it was written by a classically-educated European, viewing everything from a stranger's point of view. For example, "St. Christopher" (now St. Kitts) is compared with "Grecian Tempé, where Arcadian Pan/Knit with the Graces, tun'd his sylvan pipe"[12]. Despite its flaws, the poem is historically significant; as Lloyd W. Brown puts it:

> Sugar Cane is...an early example of what has become a long-lived tradition in West Indian poetry. It is the tradition of the Caribbean pastoral, written by British expatriates like Grainger...or in later generations by local West Indians of all backgrounds. It is based on the unimaginative imitation of popular literary forms in Western Europe, ranging from the epic and picturesque modes of the eighteenth century, to the nature poetry of the nineteenth-century British Romantics. Like

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[11] ibid. p. 474.
[12] ibid. p. 481.

> countless expatriate and locally born poets since his time Grainger perceives the West Indies as mere landscape, an exotic landscape rich in 'picturesque' images.'[3]

A notable exception to the tradition of expatriate British writing in the West Indies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is the work of Francis Williams (d.1770), a native, black Jamaican. It is unfortunate that most of our information about Williams derives from Edward Long's History of Jamaica (1774). We are forced to read between the lines of Long's racist invective against Williams to try to determine his true worth as a poet. Here is Long's description of Williams's background, education, and personality:

> Francis Williams, a native of this island, and son to John & Dorothy Williams, free Negroes...being a boy of unusual lively parts, was pitched upon to be the subject of an experiment, which, it is said, the Duke of Montagu was curious to make, in order to discover, whether, by proper cultivation, and a regular course of tuition at school and the university, a Negroe might not be found as capable of literature as a white person. In short, he was sent to England, where he underwent a regular discipline of classic instruction at a grammar school, after which he was fixed at the university of Cambridge, where he studied under the ablest preceptors, and made some progress in the mathematics.....In regard to the general character of the man, he was haughty, opinionated, looked down with sovereign contempt on his fellow Blacks, entertained the highest opinion of his own knowledge, treated his parents with much disdain, and behaved towards his children and his slaves with a severity bordering upon cruelty.'[4]

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[3] Lloyd W. Brown, West Indian Poetry (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1984), p. 20.
[4] Edward Long, The History of Jamaica (London, 1774), p. 475.

It appears, then, that Williams was a kind of 'guinea pig', an object in an experiment; he obviously proved Lord Montagu's theory, but the personality split induced in an individual by such an experiment must have been severe. Long tells us that Williams referred to himself as "a white man acting under a black skin"; in Williams's own words, "candida quod nigra corpora pelle geris." Here, almost two centuries earlier, is Frantz Fanon's celebrated phrase "peau noire, masques blancs."[55] Williams was one of the first to suffer the alienation of the colonial, who has foreign cultural norms imposed upon him; many West Indians followed in his footsteps. Although Williams's assimilation to British culture was almost complete, as shown by his habit of writing Latin odes to welcome new British governors to Jamaica, yet there are intriguing hints of his dilemma even in this conventional, occasional verse:

Crede, meum non est, vir Marti chare Minerva
Denegat Aethiopi bella fonare ducum.
...Flammiferos agitante suos sub sole jugales
Vivimus; eloquium deficit omne focis.
Hoc demum accipias, multa fuligine fufum
Ore fonaturo; non cute, corde valet.
Pollenti stabilita manu, (Deus almus, eandem
Omnigenis animam, nil prohibente dedit)
Ipsa coloris egens virtus, prudentia; honesto
Nullus inest animo, nullus in arte color.
Cur timeas, quamvis; dubitefve, nigerrima celfam
Caesaris occidui, scandere Musa domum?
Vade salutatum, nec fit tibi causa pudoris,
Candida quod nigra corpora pelle geris.

Long's translation of this passage of Williams's poem:

What, shall an Aethiop touch the martial string?

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[55]Frantz Fanon, Peau noire, masques blancs (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1952).

Of battles, leaders, great achievements sing?
Ah no Minerva, with th'indignant Nine,
Restrain him, and forbid the bold design...
We live, alas where the bright god of day,
Full from the zenith whirls his torrid ray...
Yet may you deign accept this humble song,
Tho' wrapt in gloom, and from a falt'ring tongue;
Tho' dark the stream on which the tribute flows,
Not from the skin, but from the heart it rose.
This rule was 'stablish'd by th'Eternal Mind;
Nor virtue's self, nor prudence are confin'd
To colour; none imbues the honest heart;
To science none belongs, and none to art.
Oh Muse, of blackest tint, why shrinks thy breast,
Why fears t'approach the Caesar of the West
Dispel thy doubts, with confidence ascend
The regal dome, and hail him for thy friend:
Nor blush, altho' in garb funereal drest,
Thy body's white, tho' clad in sable vest.''

Williams insists that he be judged on the basis of his ability, not his colour.

Both Williams and his Scottish contemporary, Grainger, wrote long poems in the epic mode, using metre and vocabulary that are characteristically eighteenth century. Williams's Ode to George Haldane is composed in Ovidian rhyming couplets, and even his preference for Latin rather than English was by no means unusual among classically-educated British poets of the time. Grainger's poem consists of wooden blank verse, and contains all the eighteenth century poetic conventions, such as invocations to the Muse, frequent capitalized abstractions (Freedom, Virtue, etc.), references to classical mythology, and periphrasis (e.g. "dark tartarean caves, sunk far beneath/ The Earth's dark surface", meaning "mines"). Williams's poem shares all of these features. Apart from occasional

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'' ibid. pp. 477-9.

references to himself as an "Aethiop," and the indications of dissatisfaction already mentioned, Williams's ode could easily have been written by a contemporary Englishman. And the same is true of the great majority of West Indian poems written between Williams's time and the 1940s. French Antillean verse has suffered the same history, as Frantz Fanon points out in Peau noire, masques blancs:

> Jusqu'en 1939, l'Antillais vivait, pensait, rêvait, composait des poèmes, écrivait des romans exactement comme l'aurait fait un blanc...Avant Césaire, la littérature antillaise est une littérature d'Européens. L'Antillais s'identifiait au blanc, adoptait une attitude de blanc, 'était un blanc.'[1]

During the eighteenth century poets were few and far between in the francophone Antilles. Nicolas Germain Léonard (1744-1793), of Guadeloupe, was practically the only one of these poets who gained recognition in Europe. He left his native island at an early age and spent most of the rest of his life in France, a typical career for the Antillean élite during this early period. As Jack Corzani puts it:

> Hélas, pour de multiples raisons...la plupart des hommes de lettres antillais devaient quitter très tôt leur patrie et l'oublier au point que jamais leurs oeuvres n'en reflétèrent la moindre image, même fugitive.[2]

Léonard's verse has been described thus: "L'oeuvre de Léonard est remarquable par la douceur des sentiments, la grâce des images et l'harmonieuse élégance de la

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[1]Quoted in Donald E. Herdeck, Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical-Critical Encyclopedia (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1979), p. 380.

[2]Jack Corzani, La littérature des Antilles - Guyane françaises, vol. 1 (Fort-de-France: Desormeaux, 1978), p. 110.

versification."[16] That delicacy, grace, and harmony, are the three adjectives chosen to describe his work, and that he was so readily accepted and lauded by eighteenth century French academicians, in themselves indicate that Léonard's poetry did not rock the boat of the literary establishment in France. When Léonard occasionally does refer to his native isles, he tends to treat them in the sentimentalized and nostalgic manner typical of the exile:

> Antille merveilleuse où les brunes Dryades
> A ma muse naissante ont inspiré des vers.
> Ne reverrai-je plus tes bruyantes cascades
> Des côteaux panachés descendre dans les mers?
> N'irai-je plus m'asseoir à l'ombre des granades,
> Du jasmin virginal qui formait ces arcades
> Et du pâle oranger vacillant dans les airs?[17]

In the Spanish West Indies as early as the seventeenth century, there were, according to one commentator, "más poetas que estiércol" (more poets than shit).[18] Although this is undoubtedly an exaggeration, there were Spanish poets writing in the Caribbean even as early as the sixteenth century, whereas the earliest examples of English and French poetry from the area date from the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the Spanish Antillean poetry resembles its later English and French counterparts in being highly imitative of European models. The earliest poets of all were actually born and educated in Spain, so that their adherence to European models is predictable.

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[16]Michaud, Biographie Universelle, quoted in Herdeck, et al., p. 425.
[17]Quoted in Auguste Joyau, Panorama de la littérature à la Martinique, vol. 2 (Morne Rouge: Caraïbes, 1974), p. 384.
[18]González de Eslava, Coloquios, no. 16 (Mexico: 1610).

Probably the earliest poet of the Spanish West Indies whose work still survives was Juan de Castellanos (1522-1607), who was born in Andalusia but came to Puerto Rico in his youth. His major work is entitled Elegías de varones ilustres de Indias, and was first published in Madrid in 1589.'[2]

The Elegías constitute the longest poem ever written in Spanish, reaching over 150,000 lines of mostly pedestrian "octava rima." The poem is really a chronicle in verse, and its value is mainly historiographical, rather than literary. Yet it is also significant in its very lack of originality; like Grainger and Williams, Castellanos was unable to throw off either the epic mode or the classical trappings, for he saw nothing incongruous in calling the sun setting behind the hills of Puerto Rico "Phoebus," nor the rising moon "Diana." Like a true Renaissance man, he uses the Italian metre already consecrated by the great Spanish pastoral poet, Garcilaso de la Vega (1503-36).

Other notable Spanish Caribbean poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries include Silvestre de Balboa of Cuba, Doña Leonor de Ovando of Santo Domingo, and Francisco de Ayerra Santa María of Puerto Rico. Although Balboa was originally from the Canary Islands, while the other two were native-born Antilleans, this makes no difference to their imitative tendencies; if anything, Balboa's poem Espejo de

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'[2]Juan de Castellanos, Elegías de varones ilustres, 2nd. ed. (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1850).

paciencia (1608)'³ has more "local colour" than the other two poets' works. Balboa's poem is again an epic and a history in verse, but is heavily saturated with pastoralism and mythology: hamadryads and centaurs rub shoulders with historical personages. Again, the influence of Garcilaso is evident.

The influence of a later Spanish poet, Góngora, is shown in the few baroque sonnets which are all that remain to us of the work of Francisco de Ayerra Santa María. His "Soneto en alabanza de don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora," addressed to his Mexican friend and fellow writer, is a complex work, full of convoluted constructions, word play, and erudite allusions. The sonnet is a hyperbolic eulogy of his friend, saturated with the conventions of Gongorist verse, such as pearls, golden crystals, sweet aromas and references to "exotic" oriental places, such as Arabia and the Ganges. This is not West Indian literature; it belongs firmly in the peninsular Spanish tradition.

Doña Leonor de Ovando is often credited as being the first woman poet of the New World; only five sonnets and some blank verse'⁴ have been preserved of her work, but these reveal a fine poetic talent. All the poems are devotional, and tinged with a mysticism reminiscent of her contemporaries, San Juan de la Cruz and Santa Teresa de

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'³Silvestre de Balboa, Espejo de paciencia (La Habana: Dirección de Cultura, 1941; original ed. 1608).

'⁴ Pedro Henríquez Ureña, La cultura y las letras coloniales en Santo Domingo (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1936), pp. 145-149.

Ávila. By eschewing the epic mode and most of the classical acoutrements (there is only one mention of Phoebus in her work), Ovando succeeded in creating a more intimate and personal kind of poetry than that written by her Antillean contemporaries. Again, there is nothing specifically Caribbean about her work, but this lack is far more appropriate to the universal tendency of mystical poetry than it is to historical, epic poetry.

None of these early poets, even the native-born ones, can truly be regarded as Caribbean writers. Considering that the modern history of the region does not begin until 1492, it is not really surprising that well-defined regional literatures did not appear in the following two centuries. Indeed, if we are to believe Froude, West Indian identity had still not been defined in the nineteenth century, and, moreover, if we are to believe V.S. Naipaul,[78] West Indians today still lack a sense of identity. Despite the obvious bias harboured by both Froude and Naipaul against the islands, there is something to be said for their judgements. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the area was still, effectively, a part of Spain, like Mexico, significantly called at the time "New Spain." Many of the inhabitants were born and educated in Spain, and even the creoles maintained strong academic links with the "patria." Moreover, the writers of the time were exceptionally restless; many moved from island to island, to Central and

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[78]See V. S. Naipaul, The Middle Passage (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

South America, and back to Spain, effectively preventing the growth of any strong patriotic attachment to any single country. And this, of course, was symptomatic of the age: the Renaissance man seemed to have suffered from congenital restlessness; had he not, the New World would never have been discovered at all. What is less easy to explain is the prolongation of the period of imitation well into the twentieth century; nevertheless, some explanations will be proferred in subsequent chapters.

An additional factor which contributed to the lack of West Indian nationalism during the first three centuries of the area's Europeanized existence, was the unstable condition of the territories themselves. War among the three main European powers was being waged continually, and the islands were successively conquered and re-conquered by different nations. Francis Williams's Ode to George Haldane, for example, expresses pleasure in Britain's recent conquest of Guadeloupe, but this was short-lived: the French soon re-conquered the island. An extreme example of this instability is afforded by the island of St. Lucia, which changed hands between the British and the French fourteen times; even today, there is some confusion there, since the spoken language is a French patois, while the official language is English. This was the pattern established in most of the territories, especially during the eighteenth century, when the inhabitants of the area had to be constantly on the alert to ward off not only invading forces

but also pirates and freebooters. No wonder that the eighteenth century saw a dearth of literary production in the entire area. As the critic Otto Olivera puts it:

> En la historia de la cultura cubana el período que va de 1609 a 1761 se caracteriza por la ausencia casi absoluta de expresión literaria; y la creación poética nada, o muy poco, refleja la existencia criolla de la época.'[74]

After the epic, pastoral, and baroque poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries came the neoclassicism of the later eighteenth century. In Cuba this gave rise to a spate of occasional verses and eulogies addressed to kings, governors, patrons, and so on; in fact precisely the same genre as employed by the contemporary Jamaican poet, Francis Williams. An example of this type of occasional verse is Las delicias de España (1788), by Manuel del Socorro Rodríguez, which is dedicated to the prince of Asturias. As the title suggests, the poet was as enthusiastically patriotic about Spain as was Williams about Britain.

In Santo Domingo, the most celebrated poet of the time was Manuel Monica (b.circa 1731), a black man whose father had been a slave. Monica's work is typical of a great deal of popular verse and song prevalent in the Caribbean; most of the authors, however, remain anonymous. In each territory there is a distinctive oral poetry, to be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven below. Occasionally, a folk poet such as Monica, or the nineteenth century Cuban, "Plácido," achieved personal fame, but by and large the songs remain

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[74]Otto Olivera, Cuba en su Poesía (Mexico: Ediciones de Andrea, 1965), p. 42.

anonymous and fluid, changing according to the whims of the singer. Until the present century, the two traditions continued in isolation, having very little influence upon each other, each being the poetic expression of a distinct stratum of society.

To conclude, then, the first three centuries of European presence in the Caribbean saw the emergence of colonial, imitative literatures. Following the prose chronicles of the first explorers and settlers came the first literary expression of native-born creoles and former slaves. The early chroniclers wrote for an audience of Europeans "back home," who were eager to hear of the New World. That this audience was quite large is indicated by the fact that works such as Ralegh's Discoverie were best-sellers, and were translated into other European languages, such as Latin. Moreover, the audience's ignorance of the subject matter and perhaps their desire for escape from a less than perfect Europe, gave them a very flexible horizon of expectation, allowing the explorers to give free reign to their fantasy. In other words, the audience clamoured for the new and the exotic, and their expectations were fulfilled. Nevertheless, in form these works adhered to the dominant secondary paradigms in vogue in Europe. Thus, the literature produced both by expatriate Europeans and local writers was uniformly imitative of contemporary European models. In poetry, this entailed the production of epics, pastoral poems, baroque sonnets, mystical verses and

eulogies, always according to the current trend in Spain, France and England. The audience for any kind of scribal literature within the islands themselves was minute, and this élite, mainly European-educated, had virtually the same literary expectations as an European audience. Moreover, most of these early works were not even published in the Caribbean but in París, London, and Madrid, so that they were primarily designed for a foreign market. Before the advent of Romanticism in the nineteenth century, then, poetry of considerable literary merit was occasionally written in the Caribbean, but it did not form the basis of an <u>indigenous</u> literary tradition.

IV. Chapter 4: Nineteenth Century Caribbean Poetry

A common phenomenon in the study of European literatures lying on the periphery of the literary polysystem (Portuguese, Bulgarian, and Swedish, for example, rather than, say, English, French, and German) is that there is often a long time-lapse before the main literary currents of a given age manifest themselves in these literatures. Typically, Romanticism appears in the lesser-known literatures thirty years or more after it has occupied the centre of the literary canon in the well-known ones. The time-lapse is partially explained by the delay caused by imperfect communications among countries and that caused by the need for translations of seminal works. Moreover, a target literature (the borrower) tends to adhere to norms which are being pushed to the periphery of a source literature's canon; as Even-Zohar points out, "the target literature is rarely fully contemporary with the source literature."[1] It would therefore be natural to assume that such a chronological discrepancy would be even more pronounced in faraway colonies, such as the Caribbean territories. In some cases, this is certainly true. In the English-speaking islands and in British Guiana, the innovations of the English Romantic poets had no impact at

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[1] Itamar Even-Zohar, "Universals of Literary Contacts," Papers in Historical Poetics (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1978), p. 52.

all until the late nineteenth century, by which time they were no longer innovations but clichés.

The first Romantics of the British territories were from Guyana (then British Guiana), which suffered less from the cultural vacuum that afflicted the rest of the British West Indies during the century. "Leo," for instance, was a famous Guianese poet of the late nineteenth century whose verse was accomplished but intensely Tennysonian. Ironically, it is during the twentieth century that Wordsworth and the other English Romantics have made their presence felt most in the Caribbean, especially in the school system, where, until fairly recently, Romantic English poetry was the only model offered to West Indian children. Many contemporary writers, including George Lamming and John Figueroa, have complained bitterly that they were taught that good poems had to be about clouds or daffodils. The poetry written in the anglophone Antilles during the early years of this century is unfortunately a product of such educational brainwashing. Although the advent of Romanticism to the British West Indies was delayed by almost a century, then, it later proved to be a potent but not particularly fruitful influence.

In the Spanish and French territories of the Caribbean, the coming of Romanticism was quite different. The first Romantic tendencies are found in Cuban and Haitian literature in the early years of the nineteenth century, while they appear in the literature of Puerto Rico, Santo

Domingo, and Guadeloupe in the mid-century. Meanwhile, Martinique was languishing in a cultural decline similar to that of Jamaica and Trinidad. The first francophone Antillean Romantic outside of Haiti and Guadeloupe was Daniel Thaly of Dominica, whose work did not appear until late in the century. Nevertheless, as in the British West Indies, in the French Antilles and Haiti, Romanticism may have been late in arriving, but the inhabitants never seemed to want it to leave. Not until the fundamental literary revolution of 'Négritude' in the 1930s did a decadent Romantic mode release its stranglehold on much of French and English Antillean verse.

In the Hispanic islands, Romanticism tended to be a much more authentic and productive movement than in the rest of the Caribbean. Cuba is usually considered to have produced one of the first and greatest of Romantic poets to write in Spanish in the figure of José María Heredia (1803-39). Moreover, Cuban Romanticism really pre-dates the main thrust of peninsular Spanish Romanticism, although later Cuban writers were influenced by peninsular Romantics such as Espronceda and Bécquer. As in Haiti and Guadeloupe, the primary influences upon Cuban Romantic literature were French, above all the works of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Hugo. Nevertheless, Spanish Caribbean Romanticism is sui generis, unlike the unimaginative mimicry which characterizes all too many English and French Caribbean Romantic works.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, there were a few Neoclassical writers in the West Indies, though the Neoclassical mode can never be said to have dominated Caribbean literature in the way that Romanticism was shortly to do. One of the characteristics of the Neoclassical Age in European literature may be regarded as being the highly 'public' or 'official' role accorded the poet in society; the aforementioned Jamaican, Francis Williams, then, in writing a Latin ode to welcome a new governor, fits very well into this Augustan role. Moreover, his use of Latin, his mythological allusions, his high-flown diction, and his attention to form can all be regarded as characteristic of the Neoclassical Age. But, as the previous description of Williams' education shows, he was a unique exception; not only did the other black people of the British colonies receive no formal education, but even the majority of white planters and settlers took very little interest in culture.'[1] Since the major pre-requisite of a flourishing Neoclassical literature (as in eighteenth century France, for example) is a classically-educated bourgeoisie, it is not surprising that Neoclassicism bore little fruit in the British West Indies. The few poems written in the English-speaking islands during this period, such as Grainger's above-mentioned Sugar Cane and the later effort by George Chapman, Barbadoes (1833), imitate the forms of

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[1] See James Anthony Froude, The English in the West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses, (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1888) and V. S. Naipaul The Middle Passage (New York: Macmillan, 1963) on this point.

Pope and Gray, but lack those poets' wit and verbal dexterity. Significantly, of course, both Grainger and Chapman were British expatriates; from the native West Indians of the period we have virtual silence. Interesting fragments of verse composed in Jamaican creole are to be found in Michael Scott's 1832 novel, Tom Cringle's Log. Scott was, again, an expatriate, and his novel tends to make the black slaves of Jamaica into harmless figures of fun (another form of dehumanization analogous to the unreal "happy swains" of Chapman and Grainger's pastorals), but he does transcribe apparently genuine slave songs, such as "Massa Buccra." As John Figueroa'' observes, the poem is informative from a linguistic point of view, since it indicates that Jamaican creole was fully developed by about 1750:

Massa Buccra lob for see
Bullock caper like monkee
Dance, and shump, and poke him toe
Like one humane person just so.

'But Massa Buccra have white love,
Soft and silken like one dove.
To brown girl -- him barely shivel --
To black girl -- oh, Lord, de Devil '

'But when him once two tree year here,
Him tink white lady wery great boder;
De coloured peoples, never fear,
Ah, him lob him de morest nor any oder.'

'But top -- one time bad fever catch him,
Colour'd peoples kindly watch him --
In sick-room, nurse voice like music --
From him hand taste sweet de physic.'

'' John Figueroa, Third World Studies, Case Study 1: Caribbean Sampler (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1983), p. 36.

'So alway come -- in two tree year,
And so wid you, massa -- never fear
Brown girl for cook -- for wife -- for nurse;
Buccra lady -- poo -- no wort a curse.' **

It is also of literary interest, since its similarity to modern calypso and other popular forms is striking, and suggests the existence of a long, unbroken tradition of oral poetry (initially among the illiterate) which stands in contrast to the fragmentary history of written West Indian verse.

Cuba, by the end of the eighteenth century, had a relatively strong and continuous literary production by native writers, this being in direct contrast with the British Caribbean territories, where the few literary works produced were written by British expatriates. Even in Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico, more troubled politically at this time than Cuba, flourishing literatures were extant by the 1840s. It seems that there are two main reasons for the earlier and more authentic literary development of the hispanic Antilles: firstly, the proximity to and interaction with mainland Central and South America, which were mostly Spanish-speaking, and secondly, the establishment of educational institutions and systems very early in the Spanish islands' history; for example, the first University was established in Puerto Rico in 1522, in Santo Domingo in 1539. Meanwhile, the British Indies were quite cut off from the United States, and languished as a very remote outpost

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**Michael Scott, "Massa Buccra", included in John Figueroa, Third World Studies, p. 14. N.B."Massa Buccra"=white master; "lob"=love; "shivel"=civil; "boder"=bother; "top"=stop.

of empire; the same is true of the francophone Antilles. Only very recently has there been some identification with mainland Latin America by English and French West Indian writers, thus breaking linguistic and cultural barriers. The idea of "Americanness" was far more entrenched in the hispanic Indies before it caught on in the other countries: this is attributable to the influence of mainland "federationists" like Simón Bolívar and Enrique Rodó, and the relative unity of Spain's administration of her colonies.

The few Hispanic Neoclassical poets of the turn of the century favoured the fábula, or poetic fable, a didactic form well-suited to the spirit of the age. The great Dominican statesman, José Núñez de Cáceres (1772-1846), wrote many of these fábulas, as well as patriotic verse. The titles of some of his works indicate their Aesopian nature, for example, "El lobo y la raposa" and "La araña y el águila" (1821), but the works lack any Aesopian humour, since they are heavy-handedly didactic, as this extract from the latter shows:

> Su colérico enojo le nacía
> de ver cuán alto vuelo
> la reina de las aves emprendía
> de su morada a la región del cielo,
> que todo vil insecto
> de lo bueno y lo grande es desafecto.''

Núñez de Cáceres' Cuban contemporaries, Manuel de Zequeira (1760-1846) and Manuel Justo de Rubalcava (1769-1805),

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'' Emilio J. Quiros, Antología dominicana (Santo Domingo: Ed. De La Salle, 1969), p. 13.

meanwhile, wrote nature poetry, some purely descriptive, some self-consciously pastoral, rather in the manner of Chapman's Barbadoes. Both were Neoclassical poets, though, since none of their landscapes have the mystical or anthropomorphic connotations of Baroque and Romantic nature verse; even the title of Rubalcava's "A Nise bordando un ramillete" indicates that he was more influenced by Garcilaso than by any of his contemporaries.

In writing patriotic verse, Núñez de Cáceres is typical of his age, since this and "exile" verse (and often the two are combined) are the dominant kinds of poetry in all the Caribbean territories during the century. This is an obvious example of political reality affecting, and being reflected in, literature. The biographies of the dominant poets of the nineteenth century show that a large majority of them were either forced or went voluntarily into exile. It is important to remember that Cuba and Puerto Rico were struggling for independence virtually throughout the century, so that wars, skirmishes, and executions were common hazards to be faced or escaped from by poets, as by everyone else. In the French and British colonies, writers tended to go into exile not because of political necessity but because there was no audience for their work at home: Claude McKay's adoption of Harlem, and René Maran's of Paris, are typical in this respect [12] The necessity of exile

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[12]Mervyn Morris's article "Walcott and the audience for poetry" (Caribbean Quarterly, v. 14, nos. 1 & 2, March-June, 1968, pp. 7-24) indicates that the lack of readers at home is still a problem today. And in countries like Haiti, where

for so many writers has inevitably had a profound influence on the nature of Caribbean literature. Some effects have been beneficial, for instance, the influx of new ideas and forms from the place of exile to the Caribbean (the "Harlem Renaissance" comes to the area via Claude McKay), but others, such as the tendency towards sentimentalism and nostalgia on the part of the exiled poet, have been more damaging.

As for the francophone Indies, Haiti offers a few Neoclassical poets; with a handful of exceptions, it is not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that poetry emerges in Martinique, Guadeloupe and Dominica, though prose writers were more common, for example, Louis Xavier Eyma (1816-1876), who called himself "the Balzac of the Tropics."

Haiti gained its independence in 1804, the first of the Caribbean territories to do so; it is analogous to Cuba in its relatively early literary development: for example, the first fully-fledged literary journal, L'Abeille haytienne, appeared in 1817. Nevertheless, Haiti's cultural development was hampered, and still is to a large extent, by extremely violent and disruptive politics, civil wars and dictatorships, perhaps more extreme than those suffered by any other of the West Indian lands, even its neighbour, Santo Domingo. In addition, it had, and still has, a very high rate of illiteracy, endemic poverty, and a linguistic barrier between the creole-speaking majority and the

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**(cont'd) the majority of the population is illiterate, the problem is even more acute.

French-speaking élite:

> The linguistic situation in Haiti is unique, in that all citizens are perfectly fluent in Creole, while no more than 10% have a working knowledge of French. Yet French is -- and always has been -- the only accepted language for use in government, and legal and educational activities. It is also the language of the media and of commercial advertising (although lately Creole has challenged its supremacy in these areas). Manipulation of access to the learning of the official language has effectively kept 90% of the Haitian people illiterate, and has made it virtually impossible for them to express their wishes, and to participate in the management of the country. Creole has no official status, and is still widely held to be, at best, a dialect, and, at worst, a corrupted, infantile form of French. He who speaks only Creole in Haiti belongs to the mute majority.[83]

As in Cuba and Santo Domingo, turn-of-the-century Haitian poets wrote in the Neoclassical mode and favoured moral fables and patriotic odes. Chronologically, the first Haitian poet was probably Antoine Dupré (?-1816), of whose work only a few fragments survive, including the pompously pedestrian "L'Hymne à la Liberté".

A more important figure was Jules Milscent (1778-1842) who founded the aforementioned journal, L'Abeille haytienne, and wrote fables very similar to those of his Dominican contemporary, Núñez de Cáceres, for example, "L'homme, la guêpe et le serpent." Meanwhile, patriotic odes were written by Juste Chanlatte (1766-1828) and Jean-Jacques Romane (1807-1858); the latter's "Hymne à l'indépendance," like Núñez de Cáceres' "A los vencedores de Palo Hincado" (1809) and the "Canto en justo elogio de la Isla de Puerto Rico"

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[83]Léon François Hoffmann, Essays on Haitian Literature (Washington D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1984), p. 31.

(1816) by the Galician expatriate Juan Rodríguez Calderón, can be regarded as typical examples of the rather platitudinous patriotic verse of the time. Ironically, although many of these poems express intense nationalism, they are couched in unoriginal forms and diction which owe everything to European models. Rodríguez Calderón's eulogy, moreover, offers all the clichés of the European view of the "exotic" Caribbean. A few lines from the "Elogio" should suffice to show this idealised view:

> el forastero cree con justicia
> que en la Arcadia se mira:
> no observa allí malicia,
> y sólo sencillez y grado admira... [84]

As the reference to Arcadia reveals, Rodríguez Calderón is describing a mythological, not a real place, and although some of the features he describes do correspond to a tropical scene, yet they are not really specific to Puerto Rico. In other words, the poet's purpose is to write a conventional praise-poem in order to thank his hosts for their hospitality: in the tradition of the eighteenth century, this is an elaborate occasional poem, like Francis Williams' ode to George Haldane or even some of the many Haitian Independence Odes.

Strangely, it is not until the influence of a European work, namely, Chateaubriand's Atala (1801), is felt in the Caribbean that native writers begin to write about the actual landscape of their homelands, rather than dressing

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[84] Quoted in María Teresa Babín & Stan Steiner, eds., Borinquen: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Literature (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 24.

them up to look like a Grecian Arcadia. As Hugo Barbagelata observes:

> Certes, avant Chateaubriand, des écrivains espagnols et américains avaient, dans leurs écrits, fait allusion à la nature de nos pays. Mais les poètes aimaient surtout jusqu'alors décrire des paysages conventionnels , et s'ingéniaient à imiter Horace, Virgile et Ovide.[11]

Atala was tremendously influential upon the Romantics of the Antilles and Latin America, particularly in the latter part of the nineteenth century. According to the scholar Núñez de Arenas, no fewer than seven Spanish editions of the work appeared between 1860 and 1890. Other French Romantics were also read and translated by both Haitian and Hispanic Antillean poets in the first part of the nineteenth century; foremost among these were Victor Hugo and Lamartine; Leconte de Lisle, Alfred de Musset, and Alfred de Vigny. José María Heredia (1803-1839), one of the first and best of Cuban Romantics, admired and translated works by both Chateaubriand and Lamartine, and the influence of Atala on several of his nature poems is apparent. The French Romantics and later Symbolists were also especially influential upon the Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío (1867-1916), the father of Latin American "Modernismo" which was to change Spanish West Indian literature fundamentally at the end of the century. Peninsular Spanish Romantics were also read and imitated by Cuban, Dominican, and Puerto Rican poets, but it is important to note that Spanish Antillean

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[11]Hugo D. Barbagelata, Les grandes romantiques Français et le modernisme en Amérique Latine (Paris: Eds. France-Amérique, 1961), p. 12.

Romanticism develops more or less at the same time as European Romanticism, and not after the significant time-lapse one might expect. Moreover, poets such as Heredia (Cuba), José Joaquín Pérez (Santo Domingo), and Gautier Benítez (Puerto Rico), can hardly be regarded as minor or marginal; that their work preceded or was contemporaneous with that of peninsular Spanish Romantics is an indication of its relative strength and originality. The same cannot be said of the Haitian Romantics; although several, including Oswald Durand and Coriolan Ardouin, were accomplished craftsmen, and skillful imitators, their work often strikes one as being hackneyed and unoriginal. Here we confront the central question in the field of Caribbean poetry: when does imitation become mimicry? For francophone Caribbean Romantics of the nineteenth century, the pressure of metropolitan France was still too strong for them either to throw off or to assimilate their Hugoesque and Lamartinian influences. Durand, for example, is so skillful in his imitation of Hugo that a poem such as "Idalina" is literally indistinguishable from a work by Hugo himself. In other words, Durand is not using his own voice to speak.

But to return to the Hispanic Indies, much of nineteenth century literature, especially Romantic literature, already has definite literary value and authenticity. In describing Latin American Romanticism, Jean Franco says:

> Romanticism proved more revolutionary in theory than in practice. Poets concentrated on originality of

> subject-matter and the translation of Byronic or Hugoesque themes into a Latin American context...Patriotism, the Indian and nature provided the 'original' themes...Most popular of all was the pastoral idyll set in the American countryside, for example "Bajo el mango" by the Cuban José Jacinto Milanés (1814-1863)... Order was more important to the Romantics of Latin America than freedom, tradition more important than exploration, ...conservation than revolution.''

This may be a fair summary of the phenomenon in mainland Latin America, but it does not do justice to Antillean Romanticism, particularly that of Cuba, since it was both more original and more revolutionary than Franco indicates. She does concede that in the work of José Martí, "literature and revolution were closely allied", but this is also true of the work of the first Cuban Romantic poet, José María Heredia (1803-1839).

Heredia is, according to Manuel Pedro González, "el primogénito del romanticismo hispano,"[2] since his work, saturated with Romanticism, appears before that of the other hispanic pioneers: the Duque de Rivas in Spain and Esteban Echevarría in Argentina. Heredia's life was eminently Romantic: a revolutionary forced into exile, he died young of tuberculosis in the best Keatsian tradition. Much has been written about the influence of the revolutionary statesman, Simón Bolívar, on Latin American Romantics: his example undoubtedly inspired many Antillean poets, including Heredia. It has also been suggested, for example by Cintio

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[1]Jean Franco, Spanish American Literature Since Independence (London, 1973).

[2]Manuel Pedro González, José María Heredia, primogénito del romanticismo hispano (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955).

Vitier, that Latin American history, geography, and ethnography fostered the idea of Romantic individualism in the area. That is to say, Europeans under the influence of Montaigne and Rousseau were attracted by the idea of the "noble savage": this concept in an area originally inhabited by Indians was naturally very attractive. The Indian, in fact, became one of the symbols of native identity for Antillean Romantics, who often developed it into a symbol of defiance against Spain, the coloniser and destroyer of the Indians. This is only one aspect of the main tendency in nineteenth century hispanic Caribbean literature: as Otto Olivera puts it, "lo que caracteriza al período es la búsqueda de la expresión propia en la poesía civil o en la descriptiva de paisajes, tipos, costumbres, y aborígenes locales."**

To avoid confusion, it should be realized that there are two poets named José María Heredia. To add to potential confusion, both belonged to the same family and were born in Santiago de Cuba, but the first Heredia, "el cubano" (1803-1839), wrote only in Spanish and was the "father of Hispanic Romanticism", while the second, "el francés" (1842-1905), spent most of his life in France, wrote in French, and was one of the leaders of the Parnassian movement. Both Heredias exemplify the pattern of Antillean poets being forced into exile, but while the Romantic Heredia still maintained links with Cuba and often wrote

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**Otto Olivera, Breve historia de la literatura antillana (Mexico: Studium, 1957), p. 21.

about it, the Parnassian Heredia assimilated himself completely into French society. The Cuban Heredia is thus included in this study, while the French Heredia is mentioned only as a foreign influence.

The Cuban Heredia was a precociously talented, prolific and contradictory writer; he espoused Romanticism with gusto in his youth, only to abandon and denigrate it in later life. He read the French and English Romantics and translated some of their works into Spanish, for example, Scott's Waverley. His best verse falls into two main categories: nature poetry and patriotic poetry, but very often the two kinds merge. With the publication of his Poesías in New York in 1825, Romanticism first appeared in Hispanic literature (since the first Romantic publications did not appear in Spain until c. 1834, and in Argentina in 1832).

In Heredia's poetry we can find all the most characteristic elements of European Romanticism, such as the concern for freedom, both political and personal; the emphasis upon the individual, and the individual's emotions; the discovery of landscape as a mirror of emotion; the idealization of the poet's role; and the all-pervasive sense of yearning for a vague ideal, for perfection. Yet Heredia's Romanticism does differ from, say, Espronceda's, not only because Heredia's work still retains echoes of Campoamor and other Neoclassical writers, but mainly because it projects a specifically Caribbean sensibility. He often assumes the

role of the "poeta desterrado," sometimes describing the natural beauties of Cuba with an exile's nostalgia, but more often transforming those elements into patriotic symbols, even calls to arms in his more revolutionary verse. Even in his celebrated lyrical ode, "A Niágara," ostensibly a tribute to the North American waterfall, sad memories of Cuba impinge upon his Romantic enthusiasm.

> Mas, qué en ti busca mi anhelante vista
> con inquieto afanar? Por qué no miro
> alrededor de tu caverna inmensa
> las palmas, ay , las palmas deliciosas,
> que en las llanuras de mi ardiente patria
> nacen del sol a la sonrisa, y crecen,
> y al soplo de las brisas del Océano
> bajo un cielo purísimo se mecen?[1]

His equally famous poem, "En el Teocalli de Cholula," inspired by Mexican scenery and Aztec remains, appropriately bears an American sensibility and sense of history, which perhaps owes something to Bolívar's pan-Americanism. The poem is particularly impressive when one realizes that he wrote it at the age of seventeen.

It is interesting to compare this poem with Pablo Neruda's "Las alturas de Macchu Picchu," since both works were inspired by the contemplation of pre-Columbian temples, Inca in Neruda's poem, and Aztec in Heredia's. Both works are meditations upon Latin American history and upon the interrelated roles of man and nature. That there are similarities between Heredia's work and that of one of the greatest of twentieth century poets indicates the extent of

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[1]José María Heredia, "A Niágara" in Los grandes románticos cubanos: antología, ed. Cintio Vitier (La Habana: 1960), p. 50.

Heredia's innovativeness. In "En el Teocalli" the contemplation of the Aztec temple is not merely an excuse for a traditional sic transit gloria mundi theme; it also shows the close relationship between man (the poet) and his environment, and offers some belief in human kinship (here, between the Mexican Indian and the Cuban).

"A Niágara"(1824) is a poem which reflects the contradictory elements in Heredia's literary style. The opening is a conventional Neoclassical invocation: "Templad mi lira..."; but this is followed in the next stanza by three lines which are worthy of being a Romantic poet's epitaph:

> Yo digno soy de contemplarte: siempre
> lo común y mezquino desdeñando,
> ansié por lo terrífico y sublime. ''

The identification of the poet with the waterfall is exactly the same device used, for example, by Shelley in his "Ode to the West Wind", and by countless other Romantic poets, yet the pathetic fallacy does not strike one as being overly precious or strained. The poem was the result of Heredia's actual experience in seeing Niagara for the first time; in a letter written to his uncle two days later, Heredia describes his experience thus:

> Yo no sé qué analogía tiene aquel espectáculo solitario y agreste con mis sentimientos. Me parecía ver en aquel torrente la imagen de mis pasiones y de las borrascas de mi vida. Así, así como los rápidos del Niágara hierve mi corazón en pos de la perfección ideal que en vano busco sobre la tierra.''

''ibid. p. 48.
''Quoted in Manuel Pedro González, José María Heredia,

Again, in this account and in the poem, we perceive an ardently Romantic sensibility which seems to be truly a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" rather than an affectation borrowed from European sources.

That Heredia is an Antillean, specifically a Cuban, is evident even in his most obviously conventional verse, but it is in his patriotic poetry that he becomes a spokesman not only for his patria but for his age. One of the primary characteristics of Caribbean Romanticism is its heavy emphasis on political and nationalistic poetry. This is not to say that some European Romantic poetry did not have political themes, but in the West Indies, where most countries were still under colonial rule, politics was obviously of immediate importance.

Patriotic verse, like occasional and "official" verse, is a difficult form to discuss or appreciate. The native-born critic tends to have his faculties clouded by emotion whenever he reads a patriotic poem learnt in childhood, while the same poem leaves a foreign critic feeling unmoved and indifferent. The writer of patriotic verse has to tread a very thin line between cloying sentiment and martial calls to arms; patriotic verse tends to be either rousingly successful or an abysmal failure."[1] Heredia was a celebrated patriotic poet, who wrote both

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"(cont'd) primogénito del romanticismo hispano, p. 124.

"The same, of course, has been said of Romantic poetry as a whole; or, as one anonymous parodist said of Wordsworth: "one voice is of the deep/ the other of an old, half-witted sheep."

sentimentally (for instance, in "Himno del desterrado") and martially (in "La estrella de Cuba"), but neither kind is totally unreadable. Particularly since Heredia was, as a youthful Romantic poet, predisposed towards extremes of emotion, his patriotic verse is surprisingly lacking in sentimental excesses. Not until the late nineteenth century, though, did Cuba produce -- in José Martí -- a poet capable of writing patriotic verse of universal appeal.

Nevertheless, Heredia's nationalistic poetry is a good deal more palatable than that of his Haitian contemporaries. Several Independence odes of about equally poor quality have already been mentioned; Jean Baptiste Chenet (1788-1851) and Pierre Faubert (1806-1868), two tardy Neocassicists, produced several more, including the latter's "Aux Haïtiens." In the 1830s, however, Haitian literature bagan to improve dramatically in quality, due mainly to the efforts of a literary group called "La Cénacle," which was formed in Port-au-Prince around the poets Ignace Nau (1808-1845) and Coriolan Ardouin (1812-1836). Both Nau and Ardouin were ardent supporters of Romanticism, and their work can be considered as the foundation of the Romantic movement in Haiti. Haitian Romanticism, then, begins about ten years after Cuban Romanticism, is slightly earlier than Puerto Rican and Dominican, and much earlier than British West Indian.

Ardouin is often called "le Lamartine haïtien," since his verse is imbued with the melancholy tone of Lamartine's

Méditations (1820). His poems, though, are a partial reflection of his own sad life: most of his family died when he was very young, and he himself died at the age of twenty three. Only about twenty of his poems survive, most of which are laments, for example "La tristesse," "La brise au tombeau d'Emma." Ardouin also wrote a few nature poems, but his depiction of landscape is neither recognizably local nor typically Romantic. The epigraph to "Une matinée," for instance, indicates the idyllic depiction of landscape which will be offered in the poem: "Un fleuve sortait d'Eden pour arroser le jardin" (Genesis II). This poem also contains an idealized impression of the Indian; an even more stylized account of an Indian wedding is given in "Floranna la fiancée," perhaps based on a similar scene in Chateaubriand's Atala:

> Innocence et beauté Toutes à la peau brune,
> Luisante comme l'or à l'éclat de la lune
> Moins fraîche est la rosée, et moins pur est le miel,
> Moins chaste la clarté des étoiles du ciel.''

Despite the conventionality of the verse, the poem is important as an indication of a new re-evaluation of the native in Haitian literature, this being similar to developments in contemporary Hispanic Antillean literature. Ardouin also offers us the first poem on an African theme in Haitian literature: "Minora," a narrative poem about the slave trade. Again, the depiction of African village life

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'' Pradel Pompilus and Raphaël Berrou, Histoire de la littérature haïtienne, v. 1, (Port-au-Prince: Eds. Caraïbes, 1975), p. 158.

before the coming of the traders is pastoral and idyllic, but the latter parts of the poem have some redeeming realistic elements.

Ignace Nau was Haiti's first poet of exile: poems such as "Pensées du Soir" and "Basses-Pyrénées" express his longing for his homeland, and lovingly describe the absent landscape. These descriptions sound far more authentic and less conventional than those of Ardouin. Above all, though, Nau was a love poet, albeit a rather morose one. Tombs seem to have attracted the early Haitian Romantics extraordinarily, for Nau, too, wrote "Au tombeau"; but Nau's poem, unlike Ardouin's "La brise au tombeau d'Emma," is imbued with Christian optimism ("de son trône d'or Dieu veillera sur nous"), whereas Ardouin laments:

> O sépulcre O tombeau sacré dépositaire
> Du seul bien précieux que j'avais sur la terre,
> Tu la tiens maintenant, là, morte sous mes pas,
> Comme je la tenais vivante dans mes bras...
> (from "La brise au tombeau d'Emma")''

Ardouin and Nau, then, are both Romantic poets, but they seem to have more in common with the so-called "graveyard" school of European pre-Romantics, such as Young, and with the minor-key melancholy of Lamartine, than with the more rousing, tempestuous Romantics in the Byronic style, the class to which Cubans such as Heredia certainly belong.

Romanticism in both Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo has its origins in the 1840s. The first Aquinaldo puertorriqueño

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''Pompilus and Berrou, p. 123.

was published in 1843, and this spawned four similar anthologies in the next three years. As in the other Caribbean territories, Puerto Rican Romantic poetry took many different forms, including patriotic verse, nature poetry, and "indigenist" poetry. The latter is a typical feature of most Antillean Romantic literature, taking slightly different forms on different islands; for instance, in Puerto Rico, both jíbaro (peasant) and indigenista (native Indian) verse was produced, while in Cuba, similar verse is termed guajiro and siboney, the latter being the name given to the indigenous Cuban Indians.

Manuel Alonso (1822-1889) was a jíbaro poet, while his contemporary, Santiago Vidarte (pseudonym of José Santiago Rodríguez, 1827-1848), a contributor to the Album puertorriqueño, was a Romantic poet who went into exile in Spain and rejected the "indigenist" approach. As Julio Marzán points out,** the Aguinaldo and the other anthologies were published in Barcelona by Puerto Rican students studying in Spain; it was thus natural that their verse should be less "indigenist" and more similar to "mainstream" Spanish literature of the period. There were two opposing schools of thought in nineteenth century Puerto Rico, namely the separatists, who wanted independence from Spain, and the reformists, who wanted Puerto Rico to remain Spanish. The Aguinaldo poets were, of course, reformists; they tended to

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** Julio Marzán, Inventing a Word: An Anthology of Twentieth Century Puerto Rican Poetry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

be urban, whilst the separatists were mostly rural jíbaros. Manuel Alonso's poetry can be taken as an expression of the views of the rural majority, then. Some of his poems, written in broad dialect, are included in the 1844 Album, and stand in contrast to the Romantic imitations of the other poets represented. His verse is direct and song-like, but it does have a more sophisticated Romantic overlay: witness his eulogy of the "noble savage" in "El salvaje." His most celebrated collection is El jíbaro (1849).

Both Alonso and Vidarte were influenced by Espronceda, but Vidarte emerges as a far more archetypical Romantic than Alonso. Like Ardouin in Haiti, Vidarte often affects a melancholy pose and projects his state of mind upon the landscape in the best Romantic style. In a poem such as "Insomnio" he combines landscape with nationalism; like Heredia and many other contemporary Antillean poets, he transforms landscape into a patriotic symbol:

> Y ves allí, cabe su planta umbría
> fantástico jardín de flores rico,
> donde vive el abril, sirena mía?
> Pues el jardín se llama -- PUERTO RICO.''

Another important figure in Puerto Rican literature during the period was Alejandro Tapia y Rivera (1826-1882), usually considered to be the greatest Puerto Rican writer of the first half of the nineteenth century. He wrote prolifically and in many genres, but most of his work is in the Romantic vein. His "El último borincano" is an

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''Josefina Rivera de Álvarez and Manuel Álvarez Nazario, eds., Antología general de la literatura puertorriqueña v. 1, (Madrid: Ed. Partenón, 1982), p. 190.

historical ballad depicting the extermination of the last native Indians of Puerto Rico: the poet is certainly sympathetic towards the Indian who, again, is used as a symbol of the homeland, but there is a certain ambivalence in the attitude displayed, since Tapia y Rivera was a Christian, and the Indians were, however admirable, pagans.

In the Dominican Republic, the crucial historical and literary turning point occurred in 1844, when the declaration of independence from Spain was made. As in neighbouring Haiti forty years earlier, independence (albeit, in this case, short-lived) prompted a sudden surge of patriotic verse, a great deal of it from the pen of Félix María del Monte (1819-1899). After the miserable period of the Haitian occupation (1822-1844), when schools and universities were closed, Spanish was banned, and many Dominican intellectuals fled into exile, the liberation of 1844 signalled the end of censorship and the invitation to return home for the exiles. Félix María del Monte occupies a place analogous to that of Tapia y Rivera in Puerto Rican literature, and is often called the "father of Dominican literature." He was an ardently patriotic poet, and also favoured landscape verse, a common combination for Caribbean poets of the era, as we have seen.

Although it would be untrue to say that Caribbean poets from one island have precise "counterparts" in other territories, the parallels between Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Haitian writers of the time are too numerous

to be ignored. The poet Javier Angulo Guridi (1816-1884), for instance, is an indigenist poet of the Dominican Republic, whose work is very similar to that of the siboney writers of Cuba, and the "Indianists" of Puerto Rico and Haiti. Guridi's Ensayos poéticos, which appeared in 1843, was the first collection of poems written by a Dominican native ever published. He wrote ballads about indigenous Antillean people, often idealizing their characters and ways of life, but also emphasizing the sadness of their fate.

Another Dominican poet whose work offers many analogies with his Haitian contemporaries is Manuel María Valencia (1810-1870). He was a sentimental poet, not, as one critic puts it, "de buen gusto"'' but works such as "La víspera del suicidio" reveal a *Werther*-like atmosphere similar to that of the "tomb" poems of Nau and Ardouin.

The 1830s and 40s also saw the very beginnings of British Guianese poetry, but while Romanticism was burgeoning in the Hispanic Antilles and Haiti, the first English-speaking poets were still addicted to Neoclassicism. The first collection of poems to appear in Guiana was Midnight Musings in Demerara by a "Colonist", published in 1832. Norman Cameron, in the introduction to his invaluable anthology of Guianese poetry, tells us that:

> There is not a single poem of purely local interest; in defence of which fact the author wrote "that the Colony, though fertile in everything else, is barren in incidents for poetical display -- not having the haze of antiquity to shroud, and yet beautify, the

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'' Joaquín Balaguer, Historia de la literatura dominicana 5th ed. (Buenos Aires: Gráfica Guadalupe, 1972), p. 103.

> records of past generations; and not possessing the novelty of a lately discovered country, on the present beauty or future prospects of which, the mind would delight to expatiate." As the result of this concept, his mind ever turned to his dear old England for inspiration.''

Colonist's supercilious attitude is unfortunately not redeemed by poetic dexterity: the eight poems included in Cameron's anthology are pedestrian Augustan verse.

The first native Guianese poet, a black schoolmaster originally from Grenada, was Simon Christian Oliver, who died in 1848. Only two poems of his, dating from 1838 and 1840, survive: "Lines for 1st August, 1838" and "Demerara Farewell." The first celebrates the date of the emancipation of slaves in the British colonies; again, it is couched in the kind of tired, conventional poetic diction against which Wordsworth and the other Romantics rebelled. Moreover, it reveals a highly "colonised" mentality, since it is, in effect, a eulogy of Queen Victoria.

> Oh ye first of August freed men who now liberty enjoy;
> Salute the day and shout hurrah to Queen Victoria;
> On this glad day the galling chains of Slavery were broke
> From off the necks of Afric's sons, who bled beneath its yoke.''

Oliver's other surviving poem is more interesting, since it is an autobiographical account of his return home to Grenada after spending forty years in Demerara. Nevertheless, it offers some classic gauche lines, such as:

> Losses and crosses I've endured,

'' N. E. Cameron, Guianese Poetry 1831-1931 (Georgetown: Argosy Press, 1931), p. 2.
'' ibid. p. 139.

Hard fare and what's worse yet:
My just reward have been withheld,
Full Two Hundred Pounds bad debt.'[**]

This, and many other works by nineteenth century black poets in Guiana sound very much like hymns, since most are written in simple four-line stanzas and have a strong religious tendency. The poems of Thomas Don, collected in Pious Effusions (1873), epitomize this trend. To appreciate Don's effusions, one must regard them as "spirituals," and consider them in their historical context.

While "Colonist" turned his eyes to England for inspiration and Don turned his towards heaven, it was left to Dr. Henry G. Dalton to be Guiana's first nature poet. Dalton's poetic works, published in London in 1858, contain authentic details of the Guianese landscape in such poems as "The Lamaha" and "The Essequibo and its Tributaries." In this, and in his re-discovery of the indigenous Indian ("The Carib's Complaint"), Dalton's work begins to come closer to the poetic movements in other regions of the Caribbean. He also wrote some "Lines Written After Seeing the Falls of Niagara," which can fruitfully be compared with Heredia's poem on the same subject. Although Heredia's poem is far more subjective in tone, both poets use the waterfall as a point of departure for meditation about the roles of man and nature. Dalton's poem is also noteworthy for its metrical innovation, almost unique in nineteenth century Guianese poetry.

'[**] ibid. p. 126.

Wonder of earth I stand upon thy shore,
And, spirit-awed, behold thy em'rald wave;
I see thy rapids foam, and hear them roar,--
As frenzied, like the whirlpool, waters rave,
Or wildly rush in reckless flight,
Far onward, gathering giant might,
And boldly leap thy rocky height,
Niagara.'[9]

While the first glimmerings of the Romantic spirit can be discerned in the writings of Dalton in the late 1850s, this was the period of fully-fledged Romanticism in both the Hispanic Indies and Haiti. Cuban literature, perhaps because of its early and promising start with Heredia, also offers the most diverse range of competent mid-century poets, including "Plácido" (1809-1844), José Jacinto Milanés (1814-1863), and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873).

"Plácido" was the pen name of Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés, a "mestizo libre." An exception among the white Cuban élite who wrote poetry, Plácido led a tragic life which has since made him a national hero. He wrote extremely popular street ballads and occasional poetry, and was sought after as a unique prodigy by the white upper class; his fame did not, however, prevent him from being executed in 1844 on an unproven charge of conspiracy. Since most of his poetry was improvised, very little is of consistently high quality, but his technical facility is impressive, and some compositions are wholly successful, for example, "La flor de la caña":

Yo vi una veguera
trigueña, tostada,

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[9] ibid. p. 79.

que el sol, envidioso
de sus lindas gracias,
o quizá bajando
de su esfera sacra,
prendado de ella,
la quemó la cara,
y es tierna y sencilla
como cuando saca
los primeros tilos
"la flor de la caña."[103]

José Jacinto Milanés was a completely different kind of poet from Plácido: introspective, melancholy, a Romantic in the *Werther* mould. His best works are love poems, but he also wrote satirical and descriptive verse. One of his poems of social commentary, entitled "El poeta envilecido" (1847) refers to Plácido, and is a clear condemnation of racial discrimination.

Gertrudis de Avellaneda, usually referred to simply as "La Avellaneda," was one of the literary giants of nineteenth century Cuba. Prolific and multi-talented, she has often been condemned or misunderstood because of the contradictory tendencies in her work. Like so many others, she left her native Cuba at the age of twenty two, and lived most of her life in Spain, but her work distinctly reflects her Cuban identity. Her novel, Sab (1841), for example, is an anti-slavery polemic -- one of the first of many to be published in Latin America. Poetry is, though, her primary genre; her work is always technically perfect, her forms varied and complex. Despite her liberal views, she can be seen as standing at the opposite end of the Cuban literary spectrum from Plácido, being white, rich, well-educated,

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[103] Los grandes románticos cubanos, p. 82.

cultured, painstaking. Although her work shows a definite Romantic penchant for emotion, as in poems such as "A un ruiseñor," "El genio de la melancolía," and "A la luna", her mastery of form gives her work a Parnassian flavour:

> Si parda nube de tu luz celosa
> breve momento sus destellos vela,
> para lanzarla de tu excelso trono
> céfiro, vuela.
>
> Vuela, y de nuevo tu apacible frente
> luce, y argenta la extensión del cielo...
> Nadie ay disipa de mi pobre vida
> sombras de duelo.'[83]

Here, the identification of speaker and natural world (specifically, the moon) can be seen as the Romantic device of the "pathetic fallacy," but the elegant contortion of syntax in the first verse (e. g. subject far removed from verb), the fluid alliteration of "l" sounds (luz, celosa, destellos, vela, lanzarla, excelso, vuela), and the obvious concern for the "mot juste" ("argentar" used as a verb), can all be seen as a slightly contradictory concern with art for art's sake.

Like most nineteenth century Cuban poets, she owes a great deal to Heredia, as imitative poems such as "Al mar" and "A vista del Niágara" reveal. La Avellaneda is one of a fairly large number of nineteenth century women poets from the hispanic islands; in the British, and especially the francophone territories, female writers in the period are much rarer. A few bad women poets are included in Cameron's Guianese anthology, but on the whole it is not until the

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[83] From "A la luna," Los grandes románticos cubanos, p. 172.

later twentieth century that women writers come to the fore in these countries.

The indigenist movement in Cuban poetry developed greatly in the mid-century due mainly to the work of José Fornaris (1827-1890). His celebrated collection, Cantos del siboney (1855) was a tribute to the unknown indigenous past of Cuba, which he imaginatively recreated. Analogous to siboney literature was the poetry called, variously, "criollista," "campesina," or "guajira," which centred upon the life of the "guajiro" (peasant) -- this is the precise equivalent of the Puerto Rican jíbaro. This type of verse, like the siboney variety, tended to idealize rural life and depict the guajiro as a noble, "natural" man in true Rousseauesque style. Romances cubanos (1829) by Domingo del Monte offers examples of this jíbaro poetry. The peasant, the indigenous Indian, and, occasionally, the negro, are used in Caribbean poetry of this and later periods as symbols of innocence and authenticity. The Dominican José Joaquín Pérez (1845-1900), for instance, was a major promulgator of Indianist verse. In his Fantasías indígenas (1877), according to Otto Olivera, the native Indian is portrayed "de acuerdo con las normas imperantes," since Joaquín Pérez " idealizó su psicología y su pasado convirtiéndolo en símbolo de pureza y de heroísmo patrios."[104]

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[104] Otto Olivera, Breve historia de la literatura antillana, p. 36.

During the 1850s and 60s, Cuban poetry began to show a rejection of some of the excesses of early Romanticism. In the work of poets such as Rafael María de Mendive (1821-1886), Juan Clemente Zenea (1832-1871), and Luisa Pérez de Zambrana (1835-1922), the emotional excess of some later Romanticism is tempered and toned down; there is a return to "buen gusto." All three poets wrote delicate nature poetry, as well as elegies and the inevitable patriotic poems.

In Puerto Rico and Haiti, meanwhile, French Parnassian poetry began to replace Romanticism as the dominant influence. Oswald Durand (1840-1906), the greatest Haitian poet of the century, was influenced as much by the "French" Hérédia and Gautier, as by Hugo and Lamartine. As Pradel Pompilus observes: "Durand décidément est tout aussi parnasien que romantique."[1**] The Parnassians also became tardily influential in the British West Indies in the early years of the twentieth century.

Durand was often the target of attacks by the revolutionary poets of the négritude movement in the 1930s and 40s; they regarded him as the archetypal "mimic man." It is true that Durand was an extremely gifted imitator, but some of his work shows a little originality and "local colour." Firstly, he did write some poems in Haitian creole; secondly, he wrote authentically of the Haitian landscape, although he did tend to emphasize its "exoticism"; thirdly,

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[1**]Pradel Pompilus, ed., Oswald Durand: Poésies choisies (Port-au-Prince: Imp. des Antilles, 1964), p. 27.

he showed concern for political and social issues both in Haiti and in other Antillean islands; and finally, he did not ignore the racial problem. Although it would be misleading to regard him as a poet who affirms black identity in the later négritude manner, poems such as "Le fils du noir" show that he does not always pretend to be a white Frenchman.

> ...A vingt ans, j'aimais Lise. Elle était blanche et frêle,
> Moi, l'enfant du soleil, hélas trop brun pour elle,
> Je n'eus pas un regard de ses yeux étonnés.'[1]

Masillon Coicou (1867-1908), like his compatriot, Durand, was also concerned with the question of race in his poetry. In "Complainte d'esclave," for instance, the lament is "Pourquoi donc suis-je nègre? Oh pourquoi suis-je noir?." This attenuated protest never becomes a condemnation of the white race, however, for Coicou was a francophile who spent many years in Paris as a diplomat. The beginnings of the protest of négritude are here, but Coicou himself was too "assimilated" to develop his poetic themes fully.

Virginie Sampeur (1839-1919), another Haitian poet of the later nineteenth century, was married to Oswald Durand for eight years, and many of her poems express her anger and regret at his abandonment of her. She is considered to be the first Haitian woman poet. Her famous "L'Abandonnée" is, both for its technique and its well-modulated range of emotions, admirable.

Ingrat, vous vivez donc, quand tout me dit:

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[1] Poésies choisies p. 63.

vengeance.
Mais je n'écoute pas. A défaut d'ésperance,
Le passé par instants revient, me berce encor...
Illusion, folie, ou vain rêve de femme...
Je vous aimerais tant, si vous n'étiez q'une âme.
Ah. que n'êtes-vous mort.'[8]

Two other women poets of the period were Lola Rodríguez de Tío (1843-1924) from Puerto Rico, and Salomé Ureña (1850-1897) from the Dominican Republic. Like Sampeur, Ureña was a teacher, and founded the first college of higher education for women in her country. Her feminism is reflected in her poetry, along with her belief in progress and in the future of the Dominican Republic. Her literary style is polished and classical, revealing no Romantic excesses; her models were Spanish Golden Age and eighteenth century writers, such as Moratín. She also wrote a long indigenist poem entitled "Anacoana" (1880), but most of her verse is either patriotic ("A Quisqueya") or personal ("Tristezas"). Her "La llegada del invierno" paints an idyllic picture of the Dominican landscape (like all her Caribbean contemporaries, she shied away from depicting poverty or squalor), but it is nevertheless a well-crafted and melodious poem.

Lola Rodríguez del Tío, like many of her male peers, lived most of her life in exile in Venezuela and Cuba, for political reasons. She was a determined believer in both Puerto Rican and Cuban independence, and her poetry reflects this concern. In fact, she gained a certain notoriety for the blatancy of her patriotic and revolutionary verse. Her

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[8]Pompilus and Berrou, p. 500.

work, like Salomé Ureña's and La Avellaneda's, has a distinctly more Neoclassical tone than most of her male contemporaries, particularly José Gautier Benítez (1851-1880), the dominant poet of Puerto Rican Romanticism.

The editors of the Antología general de la literatura puertorriqueña'[**] describe Gautier Benítez aptly as the counterpart of Bécquer in Spanish literature, of Musset in French literature, and of Heine in German literature. His melodious, subjective, melancholy verse certainly supports these comparisons, but he is also distinctively Antillean in his concern for the native and for the patria. Nature plays a dominant role in his poetry; as he says of himself: "Yo no soy el juglar de los festines;/ yo soy el trovador de la montaña". Puerto Rican Romanticism is normally considered to have reached its zenith in Gautier Benítez's work, but even in a few of his poems ("A Lorelay", for instance) the influence of the new Parnassian school is evident.

Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894) is considered to be the founder of the Parnassian school of poetry in France. He, Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) , and Hérédia (1842-1905), among others, all reacted against Romanticism and aimed for a "purer" poetry, art for art's sake. It may even be regarded as a new fluctuation towards classicism. It is interesting to note that one of the leaders of Parnassianism -- Hérédia -- was born in the West Indies, but only in

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[**] Josefina Rívera de Álvarez and Manuel Álvarez Nazario, Antología general de la literatura puertorriqueña, vol. 1. (Madrid: Ed. Partenón, 1982), p. 165.

Leconte de Lisle's poems are island landscapes used, in an alienated, deliberately "exotic" manner. For Leconte de Lisle, "art was not only superior to all other forms of human activity, but summed them up and made them incarnate."[10] From this description we can see that here, in French Parnassianism, are the beginnings of Latin American "modernismo," which was to transform hispanic Caribbean literature towards the end of the nineteenth century.

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[10] Anthony Hartley, ed., The Penguin Book of French Verse 3: The Nineteenth Century (Harmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), p. xxvi.

V. Chapter 5: The turn of the century

Spanish American modernismo''° can be regarded as the first of many avant garde movements in the Caribbean around the turn of the century. Unlike the later "isms" of the 1920s and '30s, modernismo was relatively long-lasting and widely influential. For the first time, a literary movement with its origins firmly in the New World (specifically, in Central America and the Caribbean) exerted a powerful influence on peninsular Spanish literature. This is the beginning of a fruitful literary interchange between the Hispanic Antilles and Spain which virtually puts an end to centuries of Antillean mimicry of European models. Spanish American modernistas influenced the great peninsular writers of the generation of 1898, such as Juan Ramón Jiménez, Antonio Machado, and Ramón del Valle-Inclán, while Federico García Lorca later repaid the debt by providing inspiration for Antillean poets of the 1930s.

According to the best-known historian of the movement, the Dominican critic and poet Max Henríquez Ureña, "el modernismo fue, ante todo, un movimiento de reacción contra los excesos del romanticismo, que ya había cumplido su misión e iba de pasada..."''' As we have seen, Romanticism

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''°This must be distinguished from the English term modernism, which is a much vaguer concept. The Spanish term refers to a particular literary movement which had its origins in Latin America and which spans the period from about 1880 to about 1920.

''' Max Henríquez Ureña, Breve historia del modernismo,

had been the dominant mode in the hispanic West Indies for most of the century, so that by the 1880s a radical change was both necessary and virtually inevitable; modernismo provided that change. The movement has sometimes been seen as the hispanic equivalent of French Symbolism, but though the modernistas certainly borrowed a great deal from Verlaine, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, and others, their work has other unique traits which owe nothing to Symbolism. Modernismo is very characteristic of its time, in its initial mood of fin de siècle decadence and anguish. However, this spiritual angst which is evident in modernista poetry is counteracted to some extent by Parnassian tendencies. The latter are at least as strong as Symbolist leanings in the works of the great poets of the movement, such as the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío (1867-1916) and the Cuban Julián del Casal (1863-1893). French Parnassian poets had already begun to oust the Romantics as the dominant influence on Antillean letters in the 1870s, and from such writers as Leconte de Lisle and the "French" Hérédia, the modernistas inherited their passion for perfect form. Many of these writers also had a penchant for the exotic, especially for things Japanese and Chinese ("Chinoiserie" was also a fashion in contemporary Europe), a somewhat bizarre development considering that the Antilles themselves had for many years served as an exotic locale for European poets.

'''(cont'd) (Buenos Aires: Fondo de cultura económica, 1954), p. 11.

Modernismo can be divided into two phases, the first exhibiting a concern with innovation and perfection in poetic form, and the second being more concerned with theme, particularly with the idea of American-ness. The first phase is perhaps more closely linked with European schools and models, while the second is linked with American or New World attempts at self-definition. The second phase thus brings us a stage closer to later, original developments in Caribbean and Latin American literature.

Hellén Ferro, in her Historia de la poesía hispanoamericana, gives this admirable summary of the effects of modernismo:

> América existió por primera vez por España, intelectualmente, gracias al Modernismo...El famoso complejo de inferioridad americano -- la aceptación pasiva del modelo europeo -- va a sufrir un fuerte golpe con el "descubrimiento" de poetas americanos por los intelectuales madrileños y, en menor escala, por los parisinos. Esto ayudará a desarrollar los nacionalismos que pujan por manifestarse. Con el Modernismo, América consigue existir, intelectualmente, para el resto del mundo. Y lo que es mejor, comienza a mirarse a sí misma con otros ojos: los americanos se sienten creadores a la par de los europeos.'''[2]

This said, it must be admitted that modernismo was less influential and generally more tardy in its appearance in the Caribbean than in the rest of Latin America, in spite of the fact that two of the "fathers" of the movement were Cuban: José Martí and Julián del Casal. Both of these pioneers died young (in 1895 and 1893, respectively), and while Martí's work was better known in the United States

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'''[2]Hellén Ferro, Historia de la poesía hispanoamericana (New York: Las Américas, 1964), p. 136-137.

than in the Caribbean because of his many years of exile there, Casal's work, like the introspective writer himself, was known only to a small group of friends. Even more importantly, Cuba was in political turmoil at the turn of the century: the war of independence was waged between 1895 and 1898, and then the United States occupied the island until 1902, with the result that the years 1895-1902 constitute a virtual lacuna in the literary life of the country. According to Max Henríquez Ureña, "A partir de 1895 había quedado paralizada dentro de Cuba la corriente modernista, apenas en su inicio."[13]

In Cuba, there are two main generations of modernista writers: pre- and post-war. Martí and Casal belong to the first generation, while the post-war writers, often called the "generación de las tres banderas," include the contributors to the Arpas cubanas anthology of 1904. Ironically, Martí and Casal were much more revolutionary in their poetic techniques and themes than were the timid post-war group, whose modernismo was at best tentative.

José Martí (1853-1895) and Julián del Casal (1863-1893) between them represent the two dominant trends in the movement: Martí's poetry is metrically revolutionary in its very simplicity (as opposed to the elaborate syntax and vocabulary of many late Antillean Romantics) and often Americanist in theme, while Casal's work displays a Parnassian concern for form and a Symbolist cultivation of

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[13] Max Henríquez Ureña, Breve historia del modernismo, p. 418.

the figurative and the exotic. While Martí was a committed revolutionary, who devoted his life to the ideal of an independent Cuba, and died fighting in one of the first battles of the war, Casal was an introverted, sickly, would-be hedonist whose ideal was an imaginary cosmopolitan Paris or an exotic Far East. Yet both were modernista poets.

Despite the fact that Martí's Versos sencillos appeared as early as 1891, these verses anticipate, both formally and thematically, a great deal of later twentieth century developments in Caribbean poetry:

> Yo soy un hombre sincero
> de donde crece la palma,
> Y antes de morirme quiero
> Echar mis versos del alma.
>
> ...Yo sé los nombres extraños
> De las yerbas y las flores,
> Y de mortales engaños,
> Y de sublimes dolores.
>
> ...Con los pobres de la tierra
> Quiero yo mi suerte echar:
> El arroyo de la sierra
> Me complace más que el mar.
>
> ...Mi verso es de un verde claro
> Y de un carmín encendido:
> Mi verso es un ciervo herido
> Que busca en el monte amparo.'''

In the famous opening lines, which have entered the realm of folk poetry, Martí unhesitatingly states his identity and purpose. Already in "yo sé los nombres extraños/ De las yerbas y las flores" we have a foreshadowing of later poets' commitment to naming the hitherto un-named, including the

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''' José Martí, Versos sencillos, Major Poems: A Bilingual Edition, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York/London: Holmes and Meier Inc., 1982), p. 58, 66, 70.

unknown flora of the Caribbean. Martí's verses present a solid, known landscape which is yet charged with symbolism: the "ciervo herido" is visually present, yet it is also a striking image of his art. Again, in his specified allegiance with "los pobres de la tierra," we have a verbal echo of Frantz Fanon's Les damnés de la terre, published seventy years later, while his uncompromisingly revolutionary stance is duplicated by Fanon and other Antillean writers of the 1950s, particularly within Cuba itself. Martí's originality and independence mark a turning point in hispanic Caribbean literature: after Martí and Independence, going hand in hand, poetry could never again lapse into servile mimicry.

In Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, modernismo was even more tardy in its arrival; in fact, when it was dying out and being replaced by new movements in Latin America, it began to come into its own in these islands. For example, it was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that modernista influence was evident in Dominican poetry, while most Puerto Rican modernistas did not emerge until the second decade. It is even more apparent in these islands that modernismo was an avant garde movement typical of the early twentieth century, to be followed by dozens of others, particularly in the 1920s and 30s. Despite slow beginnings, the vanguardist schools of these countries were diverse and numerous, more so even than those of the Latin American mainland.

Modernismo in the Caribbean islands overlapped chronologically with the avant garde movements of the 1920s and 30s. In Puerto Rico alone, there were at least eight[1] major vanguardist movements during this period. One common feature of these different innovative paradigms (primary systems) was their anti-Romanticism, or "deshumanización"; like contemporary European movements such as futurism and imagism, the poets of these schools sought to pare their work down to the bare image, purged of sentiment. The Spanish "poesía pura," championed and practiced by Juan Ramón Jiménez, also became influential, particularly after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, when Jiménez and other intellectuals took refuge in Puerto Rico. Another major characteristic of the avant-garde was its cosmopolitanism; as Carlos Ripoll observes:

> Fue una característica del vanguardismo ser cosmopolita, el romper de las fronteras de lo nacional que el siglo XIX había cincelado en Occidente...El vanguardismo es universal.[2]

The very strength and diversity of the avant garde in the hispanic Caribbean, then, can be regarded as a symptom of the move away from imitativeness and from provincialism.

Although the modernista school as such was an exclusively hispanic phenomenon, a movement similar in

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[1]Namely: PANCALISMO, PANEDISMO, DIEPALISMO, EUFORISMO, NOÍSMO, ATALAYISMO, INTEGRALISMO, and TRANSCENDENTALISMO. For a full account of these movements, see Luis Hernández Aquino, Nuestra aventura literaria (los ismos en la poesía puertorriqueña 1913-1948, 2nd. ed. (Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, 1980).

[2]Carlos Ripoll, La generación del 23 en Cuba y otros apuntes sobre el vanguardismo (New York: Las Américas, 1968), p. 161.

intention, if not in execution, was beginning in francophone Haiti during the same period. This is generally known as the generation of "La Ronde," taking its name from the literary journal in which the new poets published their work. The periodical itself appeared between 1896 and 1902, but several literary historians accord the movement a longer life-span, from about 1890 to 1915. Like modernismo, the "La Ronde" school can be regarded as one of the first of several avant garde movements to affect the Antilles. Again, like the hispanic modernistas, the "La Ronde" poets dedicated themselves to Art, turning their back on the occasionally sentimental créole poems of Durand, for instance. This generation venerated absolutes, sought for universals, eschewed regionalism and exoticism; all tendencies which are found in many modernista poets as well. One of the leaders of the movement, Etzer Vilaire (1872-1951), described his poetic credo thus:

> Je n'ai point écrit pour les amateurs d'exotisme. J'ai parlé, j'ai écrit pour ceux que tourmentent le drame de la vie, les problèmes de la destinée de l'âme.'''

Although the desire for universality may at first appear as a move away from authenticity, poets such as Vilaire contributed significantly to the formation of a more independent Haitian literary canon by rejecting the appeal of "local colour," a dominant trait of Haitian Romanticism. Yet, Romanticism is still a potent force in the generation's

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'''Quoted in Pradel Pomilus & Raphaël Berrou, Histoire de la littérature haïtienne illustrée par les textes, vol. II (Port-au-Prince: Caraïbes, 1965), p. 8.

work, as shown, for instance, by the poets' intense subjectivity and penchant for melancholy. The following sonnet, "Tristesse," is a typical example of Vilaire's style and favourite themes:

> Sur un parvis désert, antique, où le gazon
> Croît autour de tombeaux poudreux, mon âme râle,
> Dans l'ombre d'une froide et vaste cathédrale
> Presque infinie, et triste ainsi qu'une prison.
>
> La nef s'étend si loin, si loin, qu'à l'horizon
> Se perd sa colonnade immense et sculpturale.
> Un vieil orgue soupire une hymne sépulcrale;
> Puis tout se tait, nul ne murmure une oraison.
>
> Et le dôme est si haut que dans l'espace il nage
> Et se perd sous les plis d'un funèbre nuage.
> Sur chaque autel désert je verse un pleur de sang.
>
> Nul croyant, dans ce temple; et sous les sombres arches
> Je marche solitaire, ô mon âme, tu marches
> Sans jamais rencontrer le Dieu toujours absent'''

Vilaire, like the great majority of writers of "La Ronde" (as shown by the photographs of authors in Berrou's anthology) was white, a member of the privileged elite. Georges Sylvain (1866-1925) was one of the few black members of the school, though he was primarily a diplomat, and published only one proverbial "slim volume": Confidences et melancolies (1901). Predictably, it contains no reference to his colour or to the experience of black people, except for one poem, "Frères d'Afrique," a rather sentimental and rhetorical account of suffering in "l'enfer africain."

Edmond Laforest (1876-1915), Vilaire's nephew and another prominent white member of "La Ronde," was also of a melancholic bent: his first collection was entitled Poèmes

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'''Quoted in Berrou, op. cit., pp. 195-6.

melancoliques (1901). Laforest's poetry shows both thematic and stylistic similarities to that of Baudelaire and the French Symbolists. Despite this European connection and his anti-regionalist oeuvre, Laforest was an ardent Haitian nationalist: when the Americans occupied Haiti in 1915, he committed suicide as an act of defiance, on October 17, the anniversary of Dessalines' death. There exists an apocryphal tale that he died clutching a copy of the Larousse dictionary to his heart, to demonstrate his francophone allegiance, and his opposition to the Yankees. Whatever the veracity of the tale, it is certain that the American occupation had a profound effect on Haitian literary life. It forced Haitian intellectuals into a prise de conscience, and indirectly led to the indigenist movement of the late 1920s, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

In Martinique and Guadeloupe at the turn of the century, Romanticism finally came into its own. Until the mid nineteenth century, there had been a virtual dearth of poets on these islands, due mainly to poverty and illiteracy, and partly to the exodus of the educated elite to France, as chronicled by Auguste Joyau and Jack Corzani in their detailed literary histories of the area.''' At this juncture, however, two native Guadeloupian poets came to the fore, namely "Salavina," (pseudonym of Virgile Savane) and Eleuthère Saint-Prix Roné. Both were nature poets in the

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'''See: Auguste Joyau, Panorama de la littérature à la Martinique (Morne Rouge: Eds. des Caraïbes, 1974), and Jack Corzani, La littérature des Antilles-Guyane françaises (Paris: Desormeaux, 1978).

Romantic mode; Saint-Prix Roné's Matinées de poète is lyrical and pantheistic, as this extract shows:

> Ne nous résiste pas, viens c'est l'heure où notre âme,
> Que le soleil naissant caresse de sa flamme
> S'éveille comme un orgue, et par des bruits divers,
> Redit son hymne immense au Dieu de l'univers. [120]

Like Saint-Prix Roné, the fin-de-siècle Martinican writers, René Bonneville (c. 1870-1902) and Manuel Rosal, contributed to an important anthology entitled Fleurs des Antilles (1900). Strangely, though Bonneville's novels[121] are in the tradition of nineteenth century realism, and deal with social problems, such as racial prejudice, his poetry is quite unrealistic and idyllic. Corzani accurately characterizes the poets represented in this volume as "poètes mélodieux du XIXe siècle qui forment la préhistoire de la littérature martiniquaise." [122]

This stage in the development of French Antillean literature is usually termed "Doudouism." It is a highly "colonized" mode, in that it perpetuates the myth of the exotic, idyllic West Indies cherished by contemporary Europeans. It is really a branch of Parnassianism in its idealization and dehumanization of reality; the best known exponent of "Doudouism" was probably Daniel Thaly (1879-1950), of Dominica. An extremely prolific poet, Thaly was concerned with the question of race and indulged in

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[120]Quoted in Jack Corzani, La littérature des Antilles-Guyane françaises (Fort-de-France: Desormeaux, 1978) vol. II, p. 87.
[121]For example, Soeurs ennemies (Paris: Challamel, 1901).
[122]Ibid. p. 90.

nostalgia for his African ancestral origins, but his strongest allegiances remained with France, where he was educated. All of his volumes of verse, including Les Caraïbes (1899), Le jardin des tropiques (1911), and the tellingly named Nostalgies françaises (1913), were published in Paris, obviously for a French audience who still appreciated the island idyll. The cult of exoticism was most stubborn in these islands; even after the call-to-arms of Césaire and Damas in the 1930s, Martinique and Guadeloupe continued to produce their Parnassian poets. Again, historical circumstances probably affected literary developments; as Parry and Sherlock observe, "economically and socially the history of Martinique, and to a less extent of Guadeloupe, was one of somnolent stagnation punctuated by occasional riots and natural disasters."[123]

The situation was almost, but not quite, as dire in the anglophone West Indies. Although the dominant literary mode at the turn of the century and up until the 1940s was a sentimental Romanticism, yet there were glimmerings of change. As Anthony Boxill puts it:

> At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth a group of writers began to emerge who, though not convinced that West Indian society was ready to stand on its own, recognized nevertheless that it was different and that this difference from English society was not necessarily contemptible.[124]

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[123] Parry & Sherlock, A Short History of the West Indies, p. 278.

[124] Anthony Boxill, "The Beginnings to 1929," in West Indian Literature, ed. Bruce King. (London: MacMillan, 1979), p. 36.

Boxill regards the burgeoning of interest by native folklorists and linguists in the West Indies during this period as an indication of a new willingness to admit difference, though these incipient changes were manifested primarily in non-fictional prose works, rather than in poetry. These works are analogous to Jean Price-Mars's anthropological texts, which effected a similar literary resurgence in Haiti in the 1920s. However, it was not until the publication of Claude McKay's first dialect verses in 1912 that there was any true indication of a new spirit in anglophone West Indian poetry.

At the turn of the century, then, the stages reached in the literary development of the various Caribbean territories were quite different. Nevertheless, even in the most conservative or traditional islands -- Martinique, for instance -- there were signs of literary change, if only in demographic and publishing trends (fewer poets in exile, more books produced at home) than in actual literary content. Thus, for instance, francophone writers of the first half of the century, such as the Guadeloupe-born Privat d'Anglemont, left for Paris at an early age and did not return, whereas later writers, such as the Martinican René Bonneville, were educated in France, but then returned home and tried to foster an indigenous culture there. In Bonneville's case one must not, of course, rule out the possibility that he intended to flee once more to France, but was prevented from doing so by his premature demise in

the volcanic eruption of Mont Pelée in 1902. But, more seriously, by the turn of the century, books were being produced not only in Port-au-Prince and Havana, as had been the case throughout the century, but also in Fort-de France, Georgetown, and Kingston. The place of publication further indicates the potential audience of these works, so that the reading public in the Caribbean itself was certainly growing, and its tastes and expectations were shaping, and being shaped by, native-produced literature. The West Indian literary canon was beginning to form.

VI. Chapter 6: Négritude

There are two central events in the history of the Caribbean as we know it today: the arrival of the Europeans after Columbus's "discovery" and the arrival of the Africans beginning some thirty years later.'[23] Both races have shaped and determined the literature of the area. The crucial difference in the status of these "arrivants," in E. K. Brathwaite's phrase, was that the Europeans came as conquistadors and pioneers, whereas the Africans were brought against their will, as slaves. According to conservative estimates, at least twenty million Africans were transported to the New World during the three centuries of the European slave trade, five million of whom were brought to work in the Caribbean sugar cane plantations.

The painful fact and later the memory of the slave trade were for many years a great stumbling-block in the development of West Indian culture. Slavery was variously a source of shame, guilt, and repressed indignation, about which the vast majority of writers preferred to keep silence. Most nineteenth century black poets in the area wrote as if they were white, using European models and motifs, because they had yet to come to terms with their own past. Their blackness was an indelible reminder of the disgraceful past; as such, it was not allowed to enter into

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[23]See C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins (New York: Knopf, 1963), p. 4.

their assimilated verse.

One useful model used to describe the violent dehumanization and alienation caused by slavery has been formulated by the Haitian poet, René Dépestre, who calls the experience a "stérilisation de la personnalité" and equates it with "zombification." He goes on to explain:

> Ce n'est pas par hasard qu'il existe en Haïti le mythe du zombi, c'est-à-dire le mort-vivant, l'homme à qui on a volé son esprit et sa raison, en lui laissant sa seule force de travail. Selon le mythe, il était interdit de mettre du sel dans les aliments du zombi, car cela pourrait réveiller ses facultés créatrices. L'histoire de la colonisation est celle d'un processus de zombification généralisée de l'homme. C'est aussi l'histoire de la quête d'un sel revitalisant, capable de restituer à l'homme l'usage de son imagination et de sa culture.'[126]

Notwithstanding some evidence of racial consciousness in the work of individual poets, particularly Haitians, such as Durand and Coicou, in the late nineteenth century, and the early vindications of the black race by Afro-Americans such as Edward Blyden, it was not until the 1920s that black West Indian poets really acknowledged and, finally, exalted their blackness. The fundamental revolution of négritude -- the self-conscious affirmation of blackness or, in Dépestre's terms, the salt in the zombie's food -- began in several different areas of the black diaspora during this period, predominantly in Harlem, Cuba, and Paris.

'[126] Quoted in D. A. McMurray, "The Theme of the Negro in the Literature of the Americas: Some Brief Remarks," Actes du VIIe Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée, v. I, eds. Milan Dimić & Juan Ferraté (Stuttgart: Erich Bieber, 1979), pp. 349-350.

It is difficult to determine precisely where and when the first cry of revolt was heard. What is certain is that the secondary systems which had for so long occupied the centres of the literary canons were moving towards the periphery of those systems, with a large proportion of epigonal works, and that the time was ripe for new primary systems to enter the canons. The European literary canon was evidently in need of purging, since even some mainstream writers were experiencing a fundamental crise de conscience, occasioned by the apparent collapse of Western civilisation in the disaster of the First World War. That white European and American artists were also turning towards Africa and other non-Western modes of art for inspiration is indicative of this widely-felt need for change: a new, primary literary current.

It would be convenient to explain the phenomenon of négritude with an absolute statement such as Virginia Woolf's contention that in 1910 "human character changed."[13] The sudden surge of creative publication by black people in the 1910s and 1920s certainly seems to support the view that something basic changed in the black psyche at this time. In fact, the crisis which precipitated European Modernism and led to the Harlem Renaissance can be seen as one and the same thing, namely, the Great War, which was widely regarded as a symptom of the failure of European society and values. If white people were themselves

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[13] Virginia Woolf, The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1950) 96.

disillusioned with their civilization, how much more so were the ancestral victims of that civilization: descendants of slaves in the United States and the Caribbean, and exploited colonials in the outposts of Empire? Moreover, the war effected a major relocation of black populations, bringing New World blacks to Europe and vice versa, as well as Southern blacks to the urban centres of the North, especially New York. Harlem in the twenties was a place of extraordinary vibrancy, according to all contemporary accounts[128] ; black people from all points of the compass congregated there, and diverse languages were heard on every street, the common language being music (jazz and blues) and dance. After the polemical debates and treatises of the 1910s came the artistic expression of the twenties, when political repression made direct statements of revolt inadvisable. Radical thinkers such as W. E. B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey contributed a great deal to the image of the so-called "New Negro," but it was poets such as Langston Hughes and Claude McKay who made this theoretical construct live.

Claude McKay (1889-1948), though his name is nearly always associated with Afro-American literature, was actually a Jamaican, who did not leave his native island until he was twenty-three years old. The Jamaican critic, Mervyn Morris, claims that: "Physically he never came home.

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[128]See Section 2 of Voices from the Harlem Renaissance, ed. Nathan Irvin Huggins. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 43-134.

But psychologically he was always ours."[129] Apart from being the first poet from the Caribbean to achieve truly international recognition, McKay is a pivotal figure in West Indian literary history in many other ways. Firstly, he was an exiled poet, who achieved his reputation and sold most of his books outside the West Indies, thus establishing a common pattern for subsequent Caribbean writers. Secondly, despite his uninterrupted exile (he never returned to Jamaica, although he travelled extensively in the United States, the Soviet Union, and Europe) his preoccupation with the West Indies and with his West Indian identity is constant throughout the poetry and novels. Thirdly, he consistently expressed his fraternity not only with all black people throughout the world, but with all the oppressed people, thus throwing off the stagnating provincialism of much previous Antillean verse. And finally, in his early dialect poetry[130], already imbued with the social conscience characteristic of his later verse, he laid the foundation for the serious use in written literature of oral forms.

In the twenties, though, McKay's major contribution was to the movement in Afro-American poetry which later came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. He, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and others, were regarded

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[129] Quoted in Donald Herdeck et al., Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical-Critical Encyclopedia (Washington D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1979), p. 141.

[130] Songs of Jamaica (Kingston: A. W. Gardner, 1912) and Constab Ballads (London: Watts, 1912).

as pioneering heroes of the black race, not only by Afro-Americans, but by European, West Indian, and African blacks, particularly by the group of writers in Paris who became the founders of francophone négritude. The Senegalese poet, Léopold Sedar Senghor who, with the Caribbeans Aimé Césaire and Léon Gontran Damas, formed the first great triumvirate of négritude, has explicitly stated that Claude McKay was the true originator of the movement:

> Claude McKay can rightfully be considered the true inventor of Negritude. I speak not of the word, but of the values of Negritude... Far from seeing in one's blackness an inferiority, one accepts it, one lays claim to it with pride, one cultivates it lovingly.'[31]

Yet, as A. James Arnold points out in his Modernism and Negritude'[32], McKay's reputation among black American critics is far from pristine. Even during his own lifetime, McKay had a reputation as being a difficult and intransigent loner who, according to more conservative elements of the black community, did nothing to help the black cause. Apart from the realistic depiction of the sleazier sides of black society in his novels, Afro-Americans also objected to his portrayal of racial discrimination among blacks and mulattoes themselves. This intra-racial caste system has historically been particularly prevalent in the French West Indies, this being a partial explanation of McKay's especial

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[31] Léopold Sedar Senghor, "La poésie négro-américaine," Liberté, vol. 1, Négritude et humanisme (Paris: Seuil, 1964) 116.

[32] A. James Arnold, Modernism and Negritude: the poetry and poetics of Aimé Césaire (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981) 28.

popularity there and in Paris. Moreover, McKay's tendency to romanticize the "primitive," "natural" black person was anathema to many urban Afro-Americans, while conversely appealing to francophone West Indians newly enamoured of the idea of Africa. These conflicts between black American and West Indian writers were later to surface quite explosively much later in the Black Writers' Congress of 1956, but in the early years, literary contacts were both amicable and fruitful.

Claude McKay's move to the United States in 1912 was a crucial experience in his poetic development. Although there was certainly racial discrimination and hardship in his native Jamaica, there was nothing to compare with the brutal oppression of blacks that he encountered in the United States. His poems became impassioned retaliations against the injustice he saw around him. He becomes the voice of the oppressed in poems such as "If We Must Die," "The Lynching," and "In Bondage." But his poems are also personal, even when he adopts the role of a black Everyman: a poem such as "Outcast" expresses a universal sense of loss, yet the "I" is distinctively West Indian, distinctively Claude McKay:

> ...Something in me is lost, forever lost,
> Some vital thing has gone out of my heart,
> And I must walk the way of life a ghost
> Among the sons of earth, a thing apart.
>
> For I was born, far from my native clime,
> Under the white man's menace, out of time.[33]

As Lloyd Brown has commented, one of McKay's greatest

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[33] Claude McKay, "Outcast", Selected Poems of Claude McKay (New York: Bookman Associates, 1953) p. 41.

achievements is in his use of the traditional sonnet form for subversive political and social purposes:

> The sonnet form, laden with centuries-old connotations of love and human idealism in Western literature is now the medium that describes the hatreds of racism and exploitation.'[134]

McKay's work has obvious thematic links with the other Harlem Renaissance writers and with the later French négritude poets, but his modulated indignation and subversive poetic techniques also align him with contemporary British "war-poets," such as Wilfred Owen. Both poets' work can be regarded as an attack upon a Western society which has caused them suffering, as a black man and a soldier, respectively. Such unexpected parallels give added weight to the argument for viewing literature as a global polysystem.

For the historian of literary influences, black literature provides a complex maze of contacts and inter-relationships stretching over three continents. In his useful survey of this network, Mercer A. Cook'[135] draws our attention to the importance of personal acquaintance among contemporary writers, for instance, René Maran and Alain Locke, Countee Cullen and Jacques Roumain, Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes, Léon Damas and Sterling Brown, and so on. He also points to the importance of Haiti (as well as

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[134] Lloyd W. Brown, West Indian Poetry, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1984.) p. 60.

[135] Mercer A. Cook, "Some Literary Contacts: African, West Indian, Afro-American," in The Black Writer in Africa and the Americas, ed. Lloyd W. Brown, (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls Inc., 1973), pp. 119-139.

New York and Paris) as a meeting place for black intellectuals:

> Contacts, literary or personal, with Haiti were...numerous...James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Rayford Logan, Alain Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois, and others had visited the Black Republic between 1920 and 1950 and most of them had written about it. La Révue Indigène, founded in 1927 by a group of young Haitians including Jacques Roumain, told its readers about the new Negro writing in the United States. Five years later the first two issues of Jacques Antoine's La Relève carried an article, "La Renaissance nègre des États-Unis," by Dr. Jean Price-Mars, who has been called "the Father of Negritude."[134]

The trouble with négritude, as can readily be seen, is that it has too many "fathers." Writers and critics variously cite Claude McKay, Jean Price-Mars, René Maran, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and even Marcus Garvey as its "true" originator. Suffice it to say that all these writers, along with others mentioned in this chapter, contributed to the renaissance of black literature generally called négritude.

In the francophone West Indies the beginnings of the movement are normally traced to a single issue of a magazine entitled Légitime Défense produced by Martinican students, which appeared in Paris in 1932. The date indicates that the voices of Afro-American poets had already been clearly heard in Paris, and in fact the Légitime Défense authors

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[134] ibid. p. 130. Price-Mars' seminal work Ainsi parla l'oncle was first published in 1928, but his ideas became influential well before this date. He was a professor of secondary education in Port-au-Prince from 1918 to 1930, and his university lectures became articles in journals such as the Revue Haïtienne and the Revue indigène from about 1919 onwards.

explicitly name Langston Hughes and Claude McKay as their models. The magazine constitutes a radical attack upon old-fashioned West Indian verse written by timid assimilés pretending to be white:

> L'Antillais, bourré à craquer de morale blanche, de culture blanche, d'éducation blanche, de préjugés blancs, étale dans ses plaquettes l'image boursouflée de lui-même. D'être un bon décalque d'homme pâle lui tient lieu de raison sociale aussi bien que de raison poétique. Il n'est jamais assez décent, assez posé -- "Tu fais comme un nègre," ne manque-t-il pas de s'indigner si, en sa présence, vous cédez à une exubérance naturelle. Aussi bien ne veut-il pas dans ses vers "faire comme un nègre." Il se fait un point d'honneur qu'un blanc puisse lire tout son livre sans deviner sa pigmentation...L'étranger chercherait en vain dans cette littérature un accent original ou profond, l'imagination sensuelle et colorée du Noir, l'écho des haines et des aspirations d'un peuple opprimé.[137]

Aimé Cesaire, agreeing with the position of the authors of Légitime Défense, said: "Point d'art. Point de poésie. Ou bien la lèpre hideuse des contrefaçons."[138]

Légitime Défense is usually regarded as the manifesto of négritude. It was a time of literary manifestoes. The other celebrated French manifesto of the age was André Breton's surrealist manifesto, and it is not wholly surprising that the West Indian rebels in Paris were ardent supporters of surrealism. In Légitime Défense the Martinicans declared war on that "abominable système de contraintes et de restrictions, d'extermination de l'amour

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[137]Authors of Légitime défense, quoted in Lilyan Kesteloot, Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature (Brussels: Institut de Sociologie, 1965) pp. 29-30.

[138]Ibid. p. 42.

et de limitation du rêve, généralement désigné sous le nom de civilisation occidentale."[139] Such a sentence could have been lifted directly from Breton's work, and in fact the West Indians go on to state explicitly that "Nous acceptons sans réserve le surréalisme auquel nous lions notre devenir."[140]

The future development of the movement was embodied in the person of Aimé Cesaire, of whom Sartre wrote: "Le surréalisme, mouvement poétique européen...dérobé aux Européens par un Noir qui le tourne contre eux et lui assigne une fonction bien définie."[141] For Cesaire, the techniques of surrealism, as manifested in his Cahier d'un retour au pays natal, were not merely destructive or anarchistic, as they had been in much of the French surrealists' work, but also redemptive: the old order was destroyed and the lost Caribbean personality redeemed.

Cesaire's Cahier, first published in 1939, became the Bible of négritude, in spite of its difficulty. It is a chronicle of the poet's return to his native land -- not Africa, but Martinique. The poem modulates in tone, reflecting the changing moods and attitudes of the speaker, at one moment vicious in his attack on his own people, on the colonisers, on his own hypocrisy, and at the next moment tender and compassionate, accepting and forgiving everything. This is far removed from exoticism. Above all,

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[139]Ibid. p. 25.
[140]Ibid. p. 44.
[141]Ibid. p. 52.

Césaire penetrated beyond the superficiality of much previous, especially French "doudouiste," West Indian poetry. He conveyed the idea of his native land as a reality, not as a faraway "fortunate isle," but chronicling all the neglected, sometimes squalid, details. He is one of the first of West Indian poets to take on the role of namer, an Adam-like role which bestows identity on hitherto un-named objects, feelings, places. In this sense, Césaire is the great pioneer of twentieth century Caribbean poetry, his importance going far beyond his role in either the surrealist or the négritude movement. He takes the islands and gives them form:

> Iles cicatrices des eaux
> Iles évidences de blessures
> Iles miettes
> Iles informes
>
> Iles mauvais papier déchiré sur les eaux
> Iles tronçons côté à côté fichés sur l'epée flambée du Soleil
> Raison rétive tu ne m'empêcheras pas de lancer absurde sur les eaux au gré des courants de moi soif votre forme, îles difformes,
> votre fin, mon défi... '[42]

While the initial impulse for francophone négritude came from Martinicans in Paris, then, these poets were soon joined by others from the Caribbean area and from Africa, notably the Guyanese Léon Gontran Damas and the Senegalese Léopold Sedar Senghor. Damas was the first of the three to have his poems published; his Pigments (1937) was initially received with critical enthusiasm, but two years later the collection was banned, since it was thought to encourage

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[42]Aimé Césaire, Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal, p. 118.

insurrection in the French African colonies. A poem such as "Et caetera" vividly lives up to the French censors' accusations:

Aux Anciens Combattants Sénégalais
aux Futurs Combattants Sénégalais
à tout ce que le Sénégal peut accoucher
de combattants sénégalais futurs-anciens
de quoi-je-me-mêle futurs anciens
de mercenaires futurs anciens
de pensionnés
de galonnés
de décorés
de décavés
de grands blessés
de mutilés
de calcinés
de gangrenés
de gueules cassées
de bras coupées
d'intoxiqués
et patati et patata
et caetera futurs anciens

Moi
je leur dis
merde et
d'autres choses encore

Moi je leur demande
de remiser les
coupe-coupe
les accès de sadisme
le sentiment
la sensation
de saletés
de malpropretés à faire

Moi
je leur demande
de taire le besoin qu'ils ressentent
de piller
de voler
de violer
de souiller à nouveau les bords antiques
du Rhin

Moi je leur demande
de commencer par envahir le Sénégal

Moi je leur demande

de foutre aux "Boches" la Paix.'[43]

That Damas's work was banned, while Césaire's was virtually ignored at first, gives an indication of the disparity of their styles. While both attack imperialism and white oppression, Damas's attack is far more direct and savage than Césaire's. The censors, never renowned for their perspicacity, probably did not understand Césaire's poetry, but Damas's "message" was, even to them, loud and clear. Senghor aptly describes Damas's work as:

> ...poésie non sophistiquée: elle est directe, brute, parfois brutale, mais sans vulgarité. Elle n'est surtout pas sentimentale, encore que souvent chargée d'une émotion qui se cache sous l'humour.'[44]

Not surprisingly, Haiti, the first Black Republic, was also an important centre for the new black consciousness of the 1920s.'[45] That it did not assume even greater importance can be explained by the fact that the educated, predominantly mulatto, elite constituted a tiny portion of the total population. For a century or more, this elite had been faithful to the modes and genres of France, but a new "indigenism," analogous to Afro-Cubanism, came into being, partly in a nationalistic reaction against the American

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'[43] Quoted in Lilyan Kesteloot, Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Négritude (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), pp. 144-145.

'[44]Léopold Sedar Senghor, Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1972), p. 5.

'[45]Two important publications asserting black pride emerged from Haiti already in the late nineteenth century, namely, Anténor Firmin's De l'Égalité des Races Humaines (1885) and Hannibal Price's De la Réhabilitation de la Race Noire par le Peuple d'Haiti (1900). Firmin's polemic was a direct response to M. de Gobineau's odious Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races Humaines (1860).

occupation of 1915, during the 1920s, and with it came a new appreciation of the black experience.

The two great figures of Haitian indigenism were Jean Price-Mars, the anthropologist, and Jacques Roumain, the poet and novelist. Price-Mars's classic study, Ainsi Parla l'oncle (1928), drew the attention of the educated elite to its own, predominantly African, folk heritage. Roumain made use of this heritage in his own work and also encouraged other writers to look to their own, primarily by founding and helping to edit La Révue Indigène. This magazine, like Césaire's Tropiques, and the Harlem-based Crisis, provided a forum in the late twenties and thirties for the new generation of poets. They also published translations of contemporary poetry, thus contributing to the network of contacts and influences (for instance, both La Révue Indigène and Tropiques published translations of poems by writers such as Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes).

Although the Révue Indigène did publish poetry on specifically black themes, this did not constitute the bulk of its publication; its content was heterogenous and avant-garde, but A. James Arnold's contention that it "represented the introduction of modernism without négritude into Haitian culture"[1] is overstated. Roumain's own poetry, well represented in the Revue, undoubtedly belongs to the négritude school; the poems of his Bois d'ebène, for example, are unmistakably poems of black protest and

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[1] A. James Arnold, Modernism and Négritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire, p. 25.

self-assertion. The poet's espousal of Communism is yet another indication of his fraternity with other poets of black consciousness during the period, such as Claude McKay and Aimé Césaire, both of whom espoused and later rejected Communism as a means of liberation. Nicolás Guillén, their Cuban contemporary, like Roumain became a life-long Communist, and his later poetry becomes increasingly political and less specifically "negrista."

Whereas most anglophone and francophone West Indian writers "discovered" black consciousness in literature outside their homelands, for instance in Harlem and Paris, hispanic West Indians found it at home. Although Césaire and other Antillean writers soon returned home and propagated the new message, negritude had in fact already been born in the islands themselves, namely in Puerto Rico and Cuba. Many critics, including the pioneering comparatist G. R. Coulthard, and the Césairean, A. James Arnold, identify the Puerto Rican poet, Luis Palés Matos, as the inventor of hispanic "negritud" in the late 1920s. Palés started out in the modernista vein (see Chapter 4), but in 1926 published "Pueblo Negro" and "Danza Negra," forerunners of the negrista poems in his famous collection Tuntún de Pasa y Grifería (1937). Some critics regard the so-called Afro-Cuban movement as yet another avant-garde trend of the twenties, and, viewed in this light, Palés's negrismo is a natural development from his earlier modernismo.

That black consciousness emerged relatively early in the literature of the hispanic islands is not wholly surprising since, as we have seen, there were strong "indigenist" tendencies there during the nineteenth century, as well as the example of the martyred mulatto poet, Plácido, not to mention a prose tradition of anti-slavery polemic.'[47] The negrista movement begins in the same vein as similar movements in other areas of the black diaspora, specifically, with a rejection of decadent white civilization. As A. James Arnold observes, both Aimé Césaire and Luis Palés Matos condemn the white world in Spenglerian terms:

> The aesthetic sense of the white race has reached a dangerous cerebralisation, cutting itself off from its cosmic roots. I do not believe in a monumental art of purely cerebral representation; I only believe in an art which identifies itself with the thing and fuses with the essence of the thing. An art which is as little art as possible, that is, where the aptitude for creation is subjected to the urge of the blood and instinct, which is always the right urge, because it carries with it the thousands of years of experience of the species.'[48]

The sentiments in this passage are echoed in the celebrated section of Césaire's Cahier beginning "Écoutez le monde blanc/ horriblement las de son effort immense..."'[49] Despite the evident similarities, it seems very unlikely that there was any direct influence of Palés upon Césaire.

'[47] For a discussion of the movements leading up to hispanic negritud , see G. R. Coulthard, Raza y color en la literatura antillana (Seville: Escuela de estudios hispanoamericanos, 1952).

'[48] Luis Palés Matos, "The Art of the White Race," Paliedro, (1927), quoted in A. James Arnold, Modernism and Négritude, pp. 21-2.

'[49]Aimé Césaire, Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal, p. 102ff.

Although the original impulses and purpose of Afro-Hispanic literature would appear to be the same as those of francophone and anglophone black literature, the forms it took were quite different. Whereas the poets of the Harlem Renaissance generally used poetic forms culled from the English and American literary traditions, if only to subvert the assumptions of those traditions, and Césaire and his followers embraced surrealism as a new, liberating poetic mode, the Afro-Hispanic writers turned instead to indigenous oral forms -- Antillean songs and dances, such as the _son_ and the _merengue_ -- for their inspiration. Afro-Hispanic verse is characterized by the use of song forms, dialect, onomatopoeic and rhythmic effects, and borrowed African words. The movement also elevated negro culture, which had hitherto remained "underground" in secret societies and religious cults, to a new degree of importance. This culture was not only a link with the African past but something inherently West Indian, with its syncretism of Roman Catholicism and fetishism, of Spanish and Yoruba and other African languages. In many ways, Afro-Cuban poetry, with its emphasis on sonority and rhythm, and its song-like simplicity, is much closer to Senghor's myth of négritude than is the complex, intellectual poetry of Césaire.'[55]

'[55]Only the work of Vachel Lindsay in the United States is comparable, although jazz and blues influences are apparent in a great deal of anglophone black poetry, such as the work of Langston Hughes and, later, of Edward Brathwaite.

Despite the Afro-Spanish poets' debt to local forms, negritud was not a wholly indigenous product. Apart from Palés Matos's reading of Spengler, and Guillén's friendship with several Afro-Americans and Haitians, there is also a significant European connection at work in this literature. During the 1920s and 30s in Spain, a group of young poets was experimenting and transforming Spanish poetic language; foremost among these innovators was the Andalusian, Federico García Lorca. Lorca's Romancero Gitano was a collection of ballads in exactly the same spirit as Guillén's Motivos de Son, except that Lorca's indigenous source was the Andalusian cante jondo. Moreover, Lorca's exaltation of the downtrodden gypsy race is analogous to the Afro-Cuban resurrection of the negro. Lorca's visit to Cuba in 1930 and his meeting with Guillén there proved to be an important influence upon the direction of subsequent Cuban verse.

Much of Nicolás Guillén's early work is chant-like, mesmerising, dependent upon sound and rhythm rather than sense for its effect. (A good example is the poem "Sensemayá", a chant for killing a snake, which consists mostly of nonsense words, but is nevertheless very effective, especially in performance). It is, in fact, pre-eminently a poetry for performance to musical accompaniment, and in this way anticipates much later developments in Antillean poetry, such as dub and reggae verse. In his collection, El Son Entero, Guillén actually includes the scores of half a dozen tunes to accompany some

of his poems.

One of Guillén's most famous poems, the "Balada de los Dos Abuelos," has become a standard influential work in the Caribbean as a whole, like Césaire's Cahier. Although it is a short and relatively simple poem, it perfectly expresses the dilemma of the West Indian, who is a cultural mulatto, no matter what his actual race:

> Sombras que sólo yo veo
> me escoltan mis dos abuelos.
> Don Federico me grita,
> y Taita Facundo calla;
> los dos en la noche sueñan,
> y andan, andan.
> Yo los junto.

As the poem shows, there are two different heritages tugging the West Indian in different directions -- towards Africa and towards Europe. For centuries, Europe was the stronger magnet, and Africa was forgotten; only during the early twentieth century was Africa discovered as an historical and mythical entity. The discovery came later to the British territories of the Antilles than to the French and Spanish (apart from the isolated example of Claude McKay), just as the political independence movements, by and large, came later. Jamaica and Trinidad, for instance, did not gain independence until 1962. The early pioneers of black poetry in the anglophone West Indies were the Jamaican George Campbell and the Guyanese Martin Carter, among others; both wrote committed, social poetry which contained an affirmation of black identity.

One important distinction between both anglophone and francophone négritude and the hispanic variety is that a large proportion of the early Spanish poetry was actually written by white West Indians, whereas almost all the négritude writers were black or mulatto. Despite episodes such as the execution of Plácido, it is true to say that Cuban and Puerto Rican society seems to have suffered less from racism than, for instance, Martinican or French Guyanese society. A. James Arnold attributes this to a tradition propagated by Martí and others of "América mestiza," but the fact that the hispanic islands had no historical Code Noir'[5]' to overcome, may also explain the more integrated racial situation on those islands.

Négritude, then, in all its diverse manifestations, has been a productive and influential movement within the black diaspora as a whole, although the very concept has been more recently attacked and ridiculed by black writers themselves, particularly anglophones. It must be said that the "mythic" aspect of négritude, as described and propagated above all by Léopold Sedar Senghor, has always been a more or less francophone phenomenon. The rediscovery of black pride and identity gave West Indian poetry a new and authentic literary canon, wide enough to embrace, for instance, onomatopoeic, surrealist, and social-protest poetry.

'[5]'The emended Code Noir of 1766 stated that: "Tous les nègres ont été transportés aux colonies comme esclaves; l'esclavage a imprimé une tache ineffaçable sur leur posterité; et par conséquent ceux qui en descendent ne peuvent jamais entrer dans la classe des blancs."

Although négritude itself may be dead,[182] black consciousness certainly lives on in the literature of the West Indies, but it has adopted new forms and embraced new themes. The following chapter attempts to chronicle the various trends which have flourished in the area since 1940.

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[182] See S. Adotevi, "Négritude is Dead: the Burial," Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts, 7-8 (1969-70), 70-81.

VII. Chapter 7: After Négritude

Although négritude poetry in its initial stages may be viewed as one of many contemporary avant-garde movements in the Caribbean, its longevity and far-reaching influence indicate that it represented a more fundamental change in Caribbean literature than any other single movement. The rediscovery of Africa, African culture, and black experience in general, entailed a reappraisal of West Indian history and identity which could not fail to have profound cultural and political effects. The atmosphere produced by the different manifestations of négritude -- Garveyism, indigenism, Afro-Cubanism, black power -- was a revolutionary one, and it comes as no surprise that many négritude writers were also political activists and revolutionaries.

Both George Campbell of Jamaica (1918-) and Martin Carter of Guyana (1927-) wrote socially committed poetry containing an affirmation of black identity and a strong political call to arms. George Campbell's only volume of poetry, First Poems, published in 1945, has about it, in Derek Walcott's words, "an innocence no politics can betray."[1] In his political and social affirmations alike, there is a simplicity which often makes his poems sound more

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[1] Derek Walcott, "George Campbell", preface to First Poems: A New Edition with Additional Poems, George Campbell, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), p. vii.

like prayers. The titles of his works reinforce this impression, for example, "Litany," "Holy," "When I Pray," and so on. In reading his poems we are reminded of Blake, whom Campbell resembles in the simplicity of his diction and in his reverential mysticism. The outraged, rebellious Blake is also evoked in Campbell's more direct social criticisms, such as "The Slums:"

> In the slums
> Jewel staring eyes
> Of human flies
> Crowd the rims
> Of our social order.
> We avoid
> The stench of slums
> Everything uncomfortable
> Insistence
> Of staring eyes
> Evidence
> Of substanceless limbs...'[14]

The savage condemnation in this and other poems is balanced by a pervasive idealism in Campbell's work, which is not only political, but humanistic.

One has only to compare Campbell's poetry with the contemporary protest songs of writers such as Linton Kwesi Johnson (see Chapter 7) to see the fundamental difference in these rebels' attitudes. Campbell does break away from conventional poetic diction and form (the pentameter, the sonnet, rhyming couplets, and so on), but he retains a vision of order which he would like to substitute for the corruption he sees around him. Johnson, on the other hand, offers us a vision of chaos and racial violence, of endless oppression and retaliation. Johnson is a West Indian living

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'[14]ibid. p. 33.

in London; his poems are set in and around Brixton and are composed in unmodified dialect. Poems such as "Song of Blood" in his collection Dread Beat and Blood'[18] are typical of his infernal picture of Thatcherite Britain. If Campbell was the poet of the revolution, Johnson is the poet of the riots.

The distance between the work of Martin Carter, the other pioneer of anglophone West Indian poetry in the 1940s, and that of George Campbell, shows that political poetry is not necessarily monotonous or limiting. Carter's work is generally more complex, angrier, and more aggressive. His poems are as personal as they are political; Carter or his persona is palpably present in his work, as Césaire is in his, and his memories, experiences, and perceptions are portrayed as being those of a Caribbean Everyman. In "I Come from the Nigger Yard," for instance, the speaker is a representative figure, but the experiences he recounts have the vigour and poignancy of personal feeling:

> I come from the nigger yard of yesterday
> leaping from the oppressors hate
> and the scorn of myself;
> from the agony of the dark hut in the shadow
> and the hurt of things;
> from the long days of cruelty and the long nights of pain
> down to the wide streets of to-morrow, of the next day
> leaping I come, who cannot see will hear.
>
> In the nigger yard I was naked like the new born
> naked like a stone or a star.
> It was a cradle of blind days rocking in time
> torn like the skin from the back of a slave.

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[18]Linton Kwesi Johnson, Dread Beat and Blood (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture, 1975).

> It was an aching floor on which I crept
> on my hands and my knees
> searching the dust for the trace of a root
> or the mark of a leaf or the shape of a flower...'[15]

This poem is one of social and racial, rather than political commitment, but for Carter, as for many other writers of his generation, the three are inextricably linked. The image of the speaker "searching the dust for the trace of a root" also indicates a common theme in the poetry of this period, and later: it reflects an impulse to establish an identity, after the revelation of the African past, to reclaim forgotten West Indian history, and to make an independent future.

Both Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott, the two best known living anglophone Antillean poets, owe a great debt to the early pioneers of _négritude_ and political protest. Brathwaite and Walcott have often been regarded by critics as opposites; one a public poet, the other a private one; one an Africanist, the other a proto-European. This simplistic division also implies that Brathwaite is committed, while Walcott remains indifferent in his ivory tower. In fact, both can be seen as committed poets, in that their work reflects aspects of West Indian experiences and aspirations.

Their approaches to poetry are very different. One might regard Brathwaite as an heir to George Campbell, in that their poetry shares a directness of form, a communal

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[15]Martin Carter, from "I Come from the Nigger Yard," _Poems of Succession_ (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1977), p. 38.

spirit, and a generally optimistic message. The last lines of Islands, the final part of Brathwaite's epic New World trilogy, The Arrivants, reflects this qualified optimism:

dawn comes

riding
over shattered homes

and furrows
over fields

and musty ghettoes
over men now

hearing
waiting

watching
in the Lent-

en morning
hurts for-

gotten, hearts
no longer bound

to black and bitter
ashes in the ground

now waking
making

making
with their

rhythms some-
thing torn

and new'[8]'

Walcott is much closer to Martin Carter in the autobiographical emphasis in his writing, and in his more pessimistic vision. Brathwaite's approach is more epic and synthesizing than Walcott's; The Arrivants, for example, is

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'[8]' Edward Brathwaite, The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 269-70.

an ambitious attempt to chronicle black history. The aim of the work seems to be similar to that other West Indian epic, Césaire's Cahier d'un retour au pays natal: to give meaning to the inchoate and the forgotten, to define West Indian identity. Walcott's major work, Another Life, also attempts to define antillanité, from a personal viewpoint which is nevertheless to be seen as representative. All three works constitute idiosyncratic personal histories: the large scale of the poems indicates a common desire to endow Caribbean literature with substantial "great works," to form an adequate canon.

Walcott refers to himself as an "assimilator," not in the sense of the colonised "assimilé," but in that he accepts and uses all influences, experiments, and produces something quite new. He can thus be seen as representative of a new kind of Antillean poet, who has thrown off the anxiety of influence, and has adopted an attitude similar to that of Ben Jonson, who defined imitation as the ability "to convert the substance or riches of another poet to (one's) own use."

Walcott began his career in Twenty-five Poems(1948) and Epitaph for the Young(1949) by imitating a diverse range of poets from the British literary tradition, like Andrew Marvell and Dylan Thomas. "In a Green Night," for example, is in the style of an ironic Marvell, while another early poem, "A City's Death By Fire," is pure Dylan Thomas, as this extract shows:

> After that hot gospeller had levelled all but the churched sky,
> I wrote the tale by tallow of a city's death by fire.
> Under a candle's eye that smoked in tears, I
> Wanted to tell in more than wax of faiths that were snapped like wire... '[5]

In his later work, Walcott's style becomes his own, though he retains the penchant for experimentation with language and metaphor, occasionally using dialect and gradually moving away from the iambic pentameter. He uses the image of the "new Adam" several times in later work, particularly the autobiographical Another Life, to describe his own approach to poetry. The "new Adam," for Walcott, is the West Indian coming to terms with himself and his "Eden," giving things their names. In his work, the West Indies are Edenic, not in the sense that they are the exotic idyll of the nineteenth century writers, but in the sense that they are new -- a New World tabula rasa on which to write anew after the long amnesia of history. Walcott places himself in what he sees as a New World tradition of the "Adamic vision," along with American writers such as Walt Whitman and Pablo Neruda.

Both Walcott and Césaire take upon themselves the role of namer, vowing to give form and substance to the previously undefined or forgotten. In Another Life, for instance, Walcott describes this early vocation:

> But drunkenly, or secretly, we swore,
> disciples of that astigmatic saint,

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[5]Derek Walcott, "A City's Death By Fire," In A Green Night (London: Cape, 1962) p. 14.

that we would never leave the island
until we had put down, in paint, in words,
as palmists learn the network of a hand,
all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines,
every neglected, self-pitying inlet
muttering in brackish dialect, the ropes of mangroves
from which old soldier crabs slipped
surrendering to slush,
each ochre track seeking some hilltop and
losing itself in an unfinished phrase,
under sand shipyards where the burnt-out palms
inverted the design of unrigged schooners,
entering forests, boiling with life,
goyave, corrosol, bois-canot, sapotille.'[15]

In the last line of this quotation, Walcott uses the vocabulary of his native St. Lucia to give names to the unique flora of that island. That Césaire uses these rare botanical names too, even more extensively, is attested to by his translators, who have had recourse to specialized dictionaries in order to do justice to his vocabulary. '[16]

Another poet born in the Antilles who uses the lush sounds of rare botanical vocabulary in his early work is Saint-John Perse, the Nobel laureate from Guadeloupe. His first volumes of poetry, Exil and Eloges, are nostalgic evocations of a lost childhood, and a lost, Edenic landscape. Only the poet's innovative language and metaphorical skill save these works from sentimentality. Perse was a poet who went into permanent exile and achieved international fame, ceasing to be an Antillean poet. Like the "French" Hérédia, who left Cuba to became a leader of

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[15] Derek Walcott, Another Life, (Washington D. C: Three Continents Press, 1982), p. 50.
[16] See Clayton Eshleman & Annette Smith, The Collected Poetry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) p. 401.

the European Parnassian movement, Perse chose to "become" a European poet. Thus, although his early idylls are interesting and pleasing from an aesthetic point of view, they appear anachronistic and incongruous when placed beside the work of his Antillean contemporaries, such as Césaire. Moreover, his work was neither published nor extensively read in the Caribbean; for all of these reasons, discussion of Perse's work must, I think, be left to critics and historiographers of European literature. Those who stayed, like Walcott and Césaire, have continued to hone and enrich their language, and to modify their visions. Perse's edenic vision is static, whereas the other poets' paradise loses its innocence. Walcott's, for example, is also a kind of hell:

> This was his heaven once. It smells like hell.
> "And what is hell, my children?
> Qui côté c'est l'enfer?
> Why, Father, on this coast.
> Father, hell is
>
> two hundred shacks on wooden stilts,
> one bushy path to the night-soil pits.
>
> Hell is this hole where the devil shits."[65]

Similarly, in Césaire's most recent collection, Noria:

> ..je m'accomode de mon mieux de cet avatar
> d'une version du paradis absurdement ratée
> --c'est bien pire qu'un enfer--
> j'habite de temps en temps une de mes plaies...[66]

Another major figure who, along with Walcott and Césaire, has attempted to define and give substance to

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[65] Another Life, pp. 36-7.
[66] Aimé Césaire, "Calendrier lagunaire," The Collected Poetry, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) p. 382.

Caribbean identity in his work is the Martinican poet and novelist, Edouard Glissant. In his prose work, Glissant talks of the essence of "antillanité," which he claims can be understood only with reference to the past. In his famous novel, La Lézarde (1955), for example, the river of the title is a symbol for the flow of history from past to present. His novelistic style, like that of the Cuban, Lezama Lima, is very close to his poetic style; since he also writes prose poetry, it seems that his creative work should be regarded as one poetic whole.

The single most influential historical event in the Caribbean this century was undoubtedly the Cuban Revolution of 1959, which instituted a Marxist regime under the leadership of Fidel Castro, still in power today. The Revolution had immediate and profound effects upon Cuban literature, but also had more subtle repercussions on Caribbean literature as a whole.

In Cuban poetry, the immediate effects of the Revolution were a dramatic increase in publication and a switch to accessible, ideologically sound, "poetry of the people." Ernesto Cardenal calls this poetry "exteriorista," adding: "es toda poesía directa, que trata de la realidad exterior."[163] Political events thus effected a marked change in the course of Cuban poetry, which had been somewhat hermetic and personal in the hands of the "Orígenes" group. However, it would be quite unjust to categorize all poetry

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[163]Ernesto Cardenal, "Presentación," Poesía cubana de la Revolución (Mexico: Extemporáneos, 1976), p. 12.

of the Revolution as an Antillean equivalent of Soviet "socialist realism." Neither is it true to say, naïvely, as does Cardenal, that: "en Cuba todos los poetas están con la Revolución, y cantan la Revolución. No hay poetas perseguidos o exiliados o presos."[164] Castro's regime does practice censorship, sometimes of a brutal kind, as is evident in Ramón J. Sender's anthology, Cinco poetas disidentes, which contains this cynical comment on the Revolution by the dissident poet, Heberto Padilla:

> "Instrucciones para ingresar en una nueva sociedad"
> Lo primero, optimista.
> Lo segundo: atildado, comedido, obediente.
> (Haber pasado todas las pruebas deportivas).
> y finalmente andar
> como lo hace cada miembro:
> un paso al frente, y
> dos o tres atrás:
> pero siempre aplaudiendo.[165]

Nevertheless, a large number of poets do celebrate the Revolution. Nicolás Guillén, for example, who has been a member of the Communist party since 1937, lived to see his socialist dream realized, and has continued to publish socially-conscious poetry in collections such as El gran zoo (1967). The younger generation of poets of the Revolution includes a good proportion of women, who give the eulogies of the new social order a feminist slant. Nancy Morejón (1944-) is one of the better known feminist poets; in "Mujer negra" she traces the history of a black Everywoman from the Middle Passage to the present:

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[164]Ibid. pp. 16-17.
[165]Ramón J. Sender, ed. Escrito en Cuba: Cinco poetas disidentes (Madrid: Playor, 1978), p. 58.

Todavía huelo la espuma del mar que me hicieron atravesar.
La noche, no puedo recordarla.
Ni el mismo océano podría recordarla.
Pero no olvido al primer alcatraz que divisé.
...Me dejaron aquí y aquí he vivido...
Su Merced me compró en una plaza.
Bordé la casaca de Su Merced y un hijo macho le parí.
Mi hijo no tuvo nombre.
Y Su Merced, murió a manos de un impecable lord inglés...
Aquí construí mi mundo.
Me fui al monte.
Mi real independencia fue el palenque
y cabalgué entre las tropas de Maceo.

Sólo un siglo más tarde,
junto a mis descendientes,
desde una azul montaña,

bajé de la Sierra

para acabar con capitales y usureros,
con generales y burgueses.
Ahora soy: Sólo hoy tenemos y creamos.
Nada nos es ajeno.
Nuestra la tierra.
Nuestros el mar y el cielo.
Nuestros la magía y la quimera.
Iguales míos, aquí los veo bailar
alrededor del árbol que plantamos para el comunismo.
Su pródiga madera ya resuena.'[1]

The Revolution inevitably had its effects upon neighbouring territories as well, particularly since the ruling regimes on several islands were repressive (Haiti, for example) or dependent on other nations (Puerto Rico upon the United States and Martinique upon France, for example). Some intellectuals moved immediately to Cuba, notably the Haitian poet, René Dépestre, who had ~~been~~ imprisoned and exiled for his Marxist beliefs in his homeland. Dépestre has

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[1]Margaret Randall, ed., Breaking the Silences: Twentieth Century Poetry by Cuban Women (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1982), pp. 150-152.

now become one of the major spokesmen for the Revolution, and continues to write formally experimental but socially committed poetry of the kind which caused a furore in his first collection, Étincelles, published when he was nineteen. Dépestre has also contributed to the excellent translation programs instituted by Castro's government, rendering Cuban poetry into French. His own work is available in English, French, and Spanish, a lamentably unusual situation in the Caribbean.

The other well-known Haitian poet of Dépestre's generation is Jean Brierre, a prolific and versatile writer who also lives in exile, in his case in Senegal. In many ways, the trajectory of Brierre's work is that of modern Haitian literature as a whole. His early work was patriotic, and couched in traditional French alexandrines, but on travelling away from Haiti, meeting Langston Hughes and others, he aligned himself with the Afro-Caribbean school. His later work is increasingly political, though in a far less crusading, more pessimistic spirit, than that of Dépestre.

Nevertheless, political poetry is by no means the only dominant trend in modern Antillean literature; in fact, after the explicit commitment of much of négritude poetry, there was a definite reaction, in the form of increasingly personal, even hermetic verse. Several movements in Haiti correspond to this trend, including the "Samba" group of poets formed in 1960, led by René Philoctète, Roland

Morisseau, Anthony Phelps, and others. (Several of the leaders of these movements now live and publish their work in Québec.) According to Silvio Baridon, the "Samba" group "proposait de renouveler la poésie à travers un intimisme souvent hermétique."[16] Two other contemporary movements are called, respectively, "spiralisme" and "pluréalisme." The former is influenced by the French nouveau roman and by linguistic experimenters such as James Joyce and the Tel Quel group. The poets and novelists who are members of this school demand creativity and participation from the reader; their work tends to be ludic and anti-logical. A short quotation from one of Frank Etienne's poems should illustrate the "spiraliste" approach:

> ...Troisième hypothèse. Les métaux alliés à la mort seraient-ils plus efficients que les mots sortis de nos lèvres par amour de la vie? Dent pour dent. Quatrième hypothèse. Toute réitération devient impossible du moment que nous reconnaissons que la vertu des abîmes est d'empêcher les retours périlleux. Le grand défi consiste à délier l'envers de la parole inscrite sur la disque irréversible de nos douleurs. Cinquième et dernière hypothèse. Tripe pour tripe. '[17]

"Pluréalisme," meanwhile, was begun by the poet Gérard Dougé in the early 1970s, in an effort to create "concrete" poetry. Like "spiralisme," it is an uncommitted type of verse, a return to pure poetry, and a far cry from négritude. Dougé says "Je suis nègre, même sans le dire...J'ignore la négritude de mon langage, de ma beauté,

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[16]Silvio F. Baridon, Poésie vivante d'Haïti (Paris: Les lettres nouvelles - Maurice Nadeau, 1978), p. 19.
[17]ibid. pp. 128-129.

mais elle est."[16]

The non-political currents in hispanic Caribbean poetry can be grouped as "transcendentalist"; poets from all three hispanic territories during the later 1940s turned to the writing of a metaphysical, spiritual type of verse. In Cuba, the main disseminator of these works was the magazine Orígenes (founded in 1944), so that poets such as José Lezama Lima, Cintio Vitier, and Fina García Marruz are often known as the Orígenes school. In the Dominican Republic, a similar kind of verse is termed "sorpresiva," its magazine being La poesía sorprendida (1943-1947). Transcendentalist writing was also produced in Puerto Rico, its best-known exponent being Julia de Burgos (1916-1953).

Julia de Burgos was among the first of a new generation of Puerto Ricans who went to live in the United States; unfortunately, her life in New York proved to be far from idyllic, and she committed suicide there in 1953. Like Martí's, Burgos's poetry is intimately related to her life, and her personal conflicts and anxieties are often at the centre of her work. Her poems are daring, erotic, but always imbued with "a death wish that she fulfilled."[17] In her later work, she verges upon surrealism, but from the first her poems are full of striking, often violent, images, as this extract from her "Río Grande de Loíza" shows:

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[16] ibid. p. 27.
[17] Julio Marzán, ed., Inventing a Word: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Puerto Rican Poetry, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. xx.

Río Grande de Loíza...Azul. Moreno. Rojo.
Espejo azul, caído pedazo azul de cielo;
desnuda carne blanca que se te vuelve negra
cada vez que la noche se te mete en el lecho;
roja franja de sangre, cuando bajo la lluvia
a torrentes su barro te vomitan los cerros.

Río hombre, pero hombre con pureza de río,
porque das tu azul alma cuando das tu azul beso.

Muy señor río mío. Río hombre. Único hombre
que ha besado en mi alma al besar en mi cuerpo.'''

José Lezama Lima's work is a good deal more esoteric than Julia de Burgos's, though it shares with hers a tendency towards the sensual and the erotic. His poetry and single novel, Paradiso (1966) have a baroque, lush style and complex, metaphysical themes. At the same time, there is an underlying ludic approach, as shown in the innovative, punning use of language.

Linguistic experimentation is also a dominant feature of contemporary anglophone Caribbean verse. On these islands, though, there has been a far greater emphasis upon resurrecting and reshaping the oral folk tradition and the language of the people. Moreover, the two dominant trends of recent years -- committed social poetry and linguistic innovation -- become fused in this new oral literature, discussed in the following chapter.

One of the dominant features which knits together the diverse aspects of contemporary Caribbean poetry is its preoccupation with the past, with history. Although Walcott, in his later works, rejects 'history' as a topic which tends

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''' Ibid. p. 54.

towards the self-destructive, preferring to work with a West Indian 'tabula rasa', the bulk of his poetry and plays is concerned with history, with a re-evaluation or re-writing of history ("He had his madness/ mine was our history"[172]). Walcott attempts to esacpe from the double traps of European mimicry and African revivalism by aligning himself with the New World, particularly Latin American poets such as Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, and Octavio Paz. In "For Pablo Neruda," he writes of these three poets:

> we were all netted to one rock
> by vines of iron, our livers
> picked by corbeaux and condors
> in the New World, in a new word
> brotherhood...'[173]

The ironic reference to the Prometheus myth here is an example of the "re-writing" of European literary paradigms which has characterized much contemporary Caribbean literature. Césaire's Une tempête (1969), a New World version of Shakespeare's Tempest, and Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), based on Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, are more ambitious instances of this re-writing. Wolfgang Bader describes this phenomenon thus:

> Dans sa production littéraire, l'auteur des Caraïbes tente en ayant pleinement conscience de la situation coloniale, d'une part de porter au jour le caractère de domination, les failles et les mensonges du discours eurocentriste, et d'autre part d'élaborer un discours décolonisé propre. La rencontre des deux niveaux de discours fait de la littérature des Caraïbes une sorte de ré-écriture, en l'occurence une contre-écriture: premièrement dans le domaine

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[172]Derek Walcott, Another Life (Washington D. C: Three Continents Press, 1982), p. 63.
[173]Derek Walcott, Sea Grapes (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), p. 61.

> spécifiquement littéraire, par la réception d'oeuvres de la littérature européenne et leur actualisation par une transformation ideologique...deuxièmement dans le domaine d'une ré- ou contre-écriture historique, qui cherche à stabiliser la propre identité par le recours à l'histoire.'[174]

Bader goes on to suggest that the literatures of the contemporary Third World as a whole can be regarded "ré" or "contre-écritures" of European literature, and its implied world views. In many ways, this willingness to use European models and shape them to their own purposes is another indication of the coming-of-age of Caribbean literature. Like Prometheus, Caribbean poets have stolen the fire of their erstwhile gods (now fallen), or, in Walcott's words, those who "entered the house of literature as a houseboy"[175] have now become its master.

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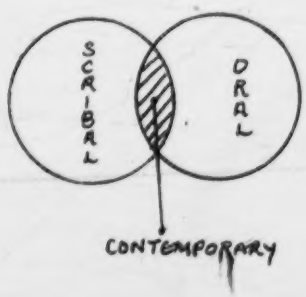
[174] Wolfgang Bader, "Tradition et décolonisation: fonction et image de la révolution haïtienne dans la littérature des Caraïbes après la seconde guerre mondiale," Actes du Xe Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (New York: Garland, 1985), pp. 234-235.
[175] Derek Walcott, Another Life, p. 74.

VIII. Chapter 8: The Oral Tradition in Caribbean Verse

Although we may speak, accurately, of a "discovery" of black, folk culture by Caribbean poets in the 1920s and 30s, it is also true to say that this very culture had always been there, side by side with, yet separate from, the written literary tradition. Like Columbus's "discovery," this phenomenon was really a meeting, in this case of two cultures: that of the educated elite and that of the uneducated folk. While for several centuries, written Antillean literature languished on the periphery of an alien canon, oral Antillean literature was totally excluded from that canon, and formed for itself a relatively independent microsystem. The new appreciation of oral literature during this century has effected a partial merging of the two separate systems. Though synthesis is by no means complete, the current situation can be visualized as a Venn diagram: two overlapping circles, in which the most vital contemporary poetry, a fusion of the scribal and the oral, occupies the central segment.



The oral literature of the West Indies is also dialect or creole literature, though dialect verse is not exclusively oral. Orality was, and is, the domain of the folk, the masses, as opposed to the scribal domain of the elite. Only in recent years have these broad categories tended to merge, with erudite poets such as Edward Brathwaite adopting dialectal and oral forms. Until recently, then, these two types of Caribbean literature have been in a symbiotic relationship (to use Even-Zohar's term); like Hebrew and Yiddish, the written, standard European language literature and the dialectal, oral literature have had opposite functions, one "highbrow," the other popular. With recent contacts between the two systems, these functions have tended to become less well-defined. Moreover, according to Even-Zohar, "Contacts are mostly unilateral"[''] and this is broadly true of the West Indian situation: scribal poetry has borrowed a great deal more from oral poetry than vice versa. Nevertheless, scribal poetry is becoming increasingly accessible to the audiences of folk verse, who were previously excluded from participating in this cultural field by reason of poverty or illiteracy.

History and language have been two of the major problems that Caribbean poets have had to deal with over the years. If the discovery and rehabilitation of negritude can be regarded as a coming to terms with, even an exorcism of, history, the discovery and rehabilitation of dialect can be

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[''] Quoted in Dmitri Segal, "Israeli Contributions to Literary Theory" p. 278.

seen as a redemption of language. The imposition of the coloniser's language and his attempts to eradicate all native African languages spoken by the slaves was one of the primary reasons for the Caribbean malaise of alienation. Nevertheless, the coloniser was never wholly successful, and the invention and fashioning of a new creole language by the slaves can be seen as a gesture of self-affirmation against all the odds. In Edward Brathwaite's words:

> It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master; and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he most effectively rebelled. Within the folk tradition, language was (and is) a creative act in itself; the word was held to contain a secret power.'''

Of course, the fact that speaking creole was looked upon as a sign of stupidity by the masters, as well as by ambitious members of the folk, partly explains why creole literature has been ignored as unworthy of serious attention until very recently.

Unfortunately, the literary historian is forced to resort to written documentation of oral literature from the past; although it is likely that many folk songs which survive today had their origins several centuries ago, there is no method of verifying this hypothesis, apart from reference to written accounts. Expatriate European diarists and historians, such as "Monk" Lewis, have left us ample testimony of a thriving slave culture, including some transcriptions of folk songs in dialect. The texts which

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'''Edward Kamau Brathwaite, History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry (London & Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1984), p. 17.

have survived from the anglophone islands are work songs and satirical skits on the white "buccra," most of which follow a call-and-response pattern. All of these features indicate the African, particularly Yoruba, roots of the slave culture. These features are also common to the folk literature of the Caribbean as a whole, whether Hispanic, French, or English. As Père Labat observed in the seventeenth century, the Caribbean islands are united by their music and song: the calypso, the son, and the beguine are all branches growing from the same African roots.

The slave songs recorded by travellers in the West Indies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are all relatively simple, rhythmic, with a great emphasis on repetition, all these features being characteristic of folk songs in general. The travellers also record that the songs were often improvised on the spot, usually by women.''* Robert Renny, in his History of Jamaica published in 1807, records the following song, and the circumstances of its composition:

> As soon as the vessel in which the author was passenger arrived near to Port Royal in Jamaica, a canoe, containing three or four black females, came to the side of the ship, for the purpose of selling oranges, and other fruits. When about to depart, they gazed at the passengers, whose number seemed to surprise them; and as soon as the canoe pushed off, one of them sang the following words, while the others joined in the chorus, clapping their hands

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''*"The style of singing among the negroes is uniform: and this is confined to the women; for the men very seldom, excepting upon extraordinary occasions, are ever heard to join in chorus." William Beckford, A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica (London, 1790); quoted in Edward Brathwaite, Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica, p. 12.

regularly, while it lasted:
New-come buckra,
He get sick,
He tak fever,
He be die;
He be die
New-come buckra etc.'''

Improvisation was also a highly esteemed quality in folk singers in the other Caribbean territories. Early accounts tell us that the companions of conquistadors such as Hernán Cortés would improvise ballads to comment upon current circumstances. It is significant to note that the majority of the Spanish immigrants to the New World were of poor, peasant families from the south of Spain, mainly Andalusia and Extremadura, where there was, and still is, a strong folk literature tradition.

The hispanic folk tradition in the Indies differs from the anglophone in its debt to European (peninsular Spanish) forms, such as the romance, the copla, and so on. Many of the folk songs current today in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba, are of purely Spanish origin, but there are also several West Indian inventions or adaptations, such as the Cuban son and the Puerto Rican décima. Hispanic folk songs cover a diverse range of forms and subjects, though the majority are either lyrical or humorous. A large number of the humorous cuartetas and décimas are misogynistic, indicating that the composers were men rather than women, as in the eighteenth century anglophone Caribbean.'''

'''Quoted in Edward Brathwaite, Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica (London & Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1970), p. 11.

'''Women folk singers or trovadoras do, however, exist in

Conversely, there are many popular verses in praise of the Virgin Mary, such as this simple Puerto Rican copla:

> Naranjas y limas
> limas y limones
> más vale la Virgen
> que todas las flores.'[11]

Religious influence is also evident in the folk literature of the anglophone Antilles. Protestant evangelists had a profound influence upon anglophone slave culture in which the language of the Bible, particularly of the Old Testament, is pervasive. The work of freed slaves such as the Guianese, Henry Dalton, is full of this influence, as are, much more recently, the reggae songs of the Jamaican Rastafarians.

But Christianity has not been the only influential religion in the folk culture of the Caribbean. In Haiti we encounter the immeasurably complex phenomenon of voodoo, with its many rites and associated songs and chants. In several West Indian countries, vestiges of African fetishistic religions have survived, often in connection with secret societies, such as the ñáñigos of Cuba. As Paula Burnett observes:

> In ritualistic contexts versions of songs in African

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[10](cont'd) the Spanish West Indies. They apparently specialise in improvised laments and songs to celebrate religious occasions. Canino Salgado mentions two famous Puerto Rican singers by name: "Entre nuestras cantadoras merecen mencionarse, por lo conocidas que son en toda la Isla, "La Calandria," pseudónimo de Ernestina Reyes, y "La Cieguita de Gurabo." El cantar folklórico de Puerto Rico, p. 41.

[11]Quoted in Marcelino J. Canino Salgado, El cantar folklórico de Puerto Rico: Estudio y Florilegio (San Juan: Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1975), p. 33.

> languages still survive, the exact form and meaning of the words having been lost, but the authority of their sound persisting.'[182]

Apart from musical similarities, the different folk songs of the various islands are also united by the fact that they are almost all couched in the language of the people, rather than in "literary" language. Normally, the people's language is a creole or dialectal form of a European language. Edward Brathwaite, in his pioneering study of anglophone West Indian oral literature, History of the Voice, objects to the term dialect because of its pejorative connotations, and uses instead the term "nation language," which he defines thus:

> Nation language is the language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspects of our New World/Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English...'[183]

Brathwaite goes on to explain that the primary characteristic of nation language is its orality, and to praise poets, like himself, who use nation language in their rejection of the ubiquitous pentameter of traditional English poetry.

Both in the anglophone and francophone Antilles, recent years (from the late 1970s to the present) have seen a great burgeoning of interest in oral poetry composed in "nation

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[182]Paula Burnett, Introduction to The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. xxx.

[183]Edward Brathwaite, History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry (London & Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1984), p. 13.

language." Many contemporary poets are also musicians, and there is an increasing emphasis on performance and recording, rather than on written poetry. Reggae poets such as Bongo Jerry; sound poets and performers such as Lillian Allen and Louise Bennett; calypso artists such as the Mighty Sparrow; creole poets such as Eugène Mona and Sonny Rupaire, have not only achieved recognition in their own right, but have also influenced the more traditional literary establishment. Now, even highly "scribal" poets such as Derek Walcott and John Figueroa are experimenting with the use of "nation language" and non-pentametric forms.

In the Hispanic Antilles, folk poetry was rediscovered somewhat sooner, during the negritud period of the 1920s and 30s, as already outlined. One poet, Nicolás Guillén, is largely responsible for the discovery of the Cuban son, and for its shaping into a written literary form.'"

Ian Smart points out the similarities between the Cuban son and the Trinidadian calypso, which he regards as evidence of a common African oral ancestry. They share a particular brand of humour, known as choteo in Spanish, picong (from the French piquant) in English, as well as the usual call-and-response pattern of many Caribbean folk songs. Moreover, the performer of these songs, particularly the calypsonian, adopts a highly professional attitude to

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'"According to Ian Smart, "One cannot begin any discussion of the son without first being acquainted with Nicolás Guillén, the inventor of the son as a poetic form in written poetry." From: "The Cuban Son: One of Africa's Contributions to Contemporary Caribbean Poetics," Journal of African and Comparative Literature, 1, (March 1981), p. 14.

his or her art, which is reminiscent of the West African griot tradition, another possible common influence.'[15] Finally, both Guillén and the calypsonians, notably the "Mighty Sparrow," use their songs for pointed social commentary or social satire. (Smart draws our attention to the specific parallels between Guillén's "Búcate plata" and Sparrow's "No money no love," for example.)

In both calypso and son, the language used, even by the scribal poets who adopt the forms, is what Brathwaite calls "nation language." Guillén, for instance, reproduces Cuban speech by omitting the letter 's' and intervocalic 'd', as well as by including local vocabulary and African-derived words. Sparrow uses everyday Trinidadian English, reproducing natural speech rhythms and eschewing the pentameter; only for purposes of humorous contrast does he use "standard" English, often in order to satirise linguistic snobs.

Both calypso and son, then, are forms of "nation language" poetry which are usually performed to musical accompaniment. The work of the Jamaican, Louise Bennett, on the other hand, constitutes "nation language" poetry which is performed without musical accompaniment. Bennett can be regarded as an inheritor of the tradition of "newspaper poets," beginning in the late nineteenth century with the

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[15]See Keith Q. Warner, Kaiso The Trinidad Calypso: A Study of the Calypso as Oral Literature, (Washington D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1984), Chapter 2, esp. p. 38ff. Coincidentally, there was a literary movement in Haiti during the 1940s called "les Griots," whose members gave emphasis to their mixed (African and European) ancestry.

work of poets such as Michael McTurk (known as "Quow," 1843-1915) and Edward Cordle (1857-1903). Claude McKay's early dialect verse also belongs to this quasi-oral tradition; Bennett has specifically cited McKay's verse as an early influence upon her work. Bennett herself has published a large number of her poems in the Jamaican newspaper, the Sunday Gleaner; although this, and her book publications, define her as a scribal poet, the tone, language, and style of her work belie this. Moreover, as Paula Burnett comments:

> It is worth bearing in mind that in societies with, until recently, only partial adult literacy, the newspaper was often read out loud, so that poems such as these probably did reach their biggest audience in an oral form.'[1]

Bennett's poetry is written in flexible, rhythmic "nation language," usually in simple, rhyming quatrains. Although she adopts a humorous style and persona ("Miss Mattie"), her work spans a diverse range of topics and emotions. Like the calypsonians, she uses satire with dexterity and a light touch; the "serious" themes which have preoccupied the scribal poets have also been her concern, but her determined use of the vernacular has denied her serious critical attention until recently. In 1947, for example, Louise Bennett published her poem "Back to Africa," a tongue-in-cheek commentary on Garveyism and Rastafarianism. Not until the 1960s did the Africanist revival become a contentious issue in scribal West Indian

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[1]Paula Burnett, ibid., p. xxix.

poetry, but Bennett's acute comment, that home is, after all, Jamaica and not Africa, was more or less ignored:

> Back to Africa, Miss Mattie?
> You no know wha you dah-seh?
> You haf fe come from someweh fus
> Before you go back deh
>
> Me know say dat you great great great
> Granma was African,
> But Mattie, doan you great great great
> Granpa was Englishman?
>
> Den you great granmader fader
> By you fader side was Jew?
> An you granpa by you mader side
> Was Frenchie parlez-vous?
>
> But de balance a you family,
> You whole generation,
> Oonoo all barn dung a Bun Grung --
> Oonoo all is Jamaican'[1]'

Other poems of social commentary include her "Colonization in Reverse," dealing with West Indian immigration to Britain in the 1950s; "Is Me," commenting on the egoism of politicians; and many poems about Jamaican independence and the doomed West Indian federation. Her "Bans o' Killing" is an ironic attack upon her own detractors, who condemn her for using "nation language:"

> So yuh a de man, me hear bout
> Ah yuh dem sey dah-teck
> Whole heap o' English oat sey dat
> Yuh gwine kill dialect
>
> Meck me get it straight Mass Charlie
> For me noh quite undastan,
> Yuh gwine kill all English dialect
> Or jus Jamaica one?...
>
> ...Yuh wi haffe get de Oxford book
> O' English verse, an tear
> Out Chaucer, Burns, Lady Grizelle

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[1]'From Louise Bennett, "Back to Africa" in The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English, ed. Paula Burnett, p. 31.

An plenty o' Shakespeare

Wen yuh done kill "wit" an "humour"
Wen yuh kill "Variety"
Yuh wi haffe fine a way fe kill
Originality

An mine how yuh dah-read dem English
Book deh pon yuh shelf
For ef yuh drop a "h" yuh mighta
Haffe kill yuhself.'**

Louise Bennett's poetry, despite obvious similarities, differs from that of younger oral poets both in composition and performance. Her work is not improvised but composed and memorized before the performance, and the delivery is spoken/acted rather than sung. Reggae and dub artists like Bongo Jerry and Paul Keens-Douglas, on the other hand, rely heavily on improvization and on musical accompaniment. In many respects, these artists use their voices and words as a jazz musician plays his instrument. Nevertheless, the result is not mere sound poetry (as some of Guillén's chants are) since almost all of these performers have a social purpose or a "message" to deliver. The British West Indian poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson, has already been mentioned in this context: his poems are impassioned, apocalyptic protests and laments about life in the black community of Brixton. Recordings of his poems, with reggae music as an integral part of the performance, regularly reach the "Top Ten" in Britain, indicating that his poetry really is for "the people." Lillian Allen is another dub poet from the West Indies who lives and performs elsewhere, in her case, in

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**From Louise Bennett, "Bans o' Killing," Jamaica Labrish (Kingston: Snagster's Book Stores, 1966), pp. 218-9.

Canada; like Kwesi Johnson, she criticises her adoptive society with great accuracy and aplomb, from a specifically female point of view:

> ITT ALCAN KAISER
> Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce
> these are privileged names in my country
> but I am illegal here
>
> My children scream
> My grandmother is dying
>
> I came to Canada
> and found the doors
> of opportunities well guarded
>
> I scrub floors
> serve backra's meals on time
> spend two days' working in one
> and twelve days in a week
>
> Here I am in Canada
> bringing up someone else's child
> while someone else and me in absentee
> bring up my own
>
> And I fight back
>
> And constantly they ask
> 'Oh beautiful tropical beach
> with coconut tree and rum
> why did you leave there
> why on earth did you come?'
>
> And I say:
> For the same reasons
> your mothers came
>
> I fight back
>
> They label me
> Immigrant, Law-breaker, Illegal
> Ah no, not Mother, not Worker, not Fighter
>
> I fight back
> like my sisters before me
> I FIGHT BACK
> I FIGHT BACK.'[*]

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[*]Lillian Allen, "I Fight Back," The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English, ed. Paula Burnett (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 74.

Lillian Allen and Linton Kwesi Johnson represent a very large and growing body of Caribbean writers who live outside the West Indies. Mass immigration to Britain from the anglophone West Indies'[''] began in the 1950s, and extensive communities of people with Caribbean roots are now well-established in most British cities. The experience of these immigrants, particularly of the first generation, finds expression in the novels and short stories of the Trinidadian, Samuel Selvon, and also in the work of younger reggae and dub poets, often born in Britain itself. The West Indian communities of London, especially, have a strong and individual culture, mostly expressed orally and through dance and carnival, but which is generally considered subversive by the authorities. Anglophone West Indians have also emigrated in large numbers to the United States and Canada; what differentiates this wide-spread diaspora from the "exiled" poets of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is that it tends to retain and affirm its cultural identity, rather than let itself be absorbed into that of the adoptive homeland.

The Haitian diaspora is also very extensive. Mention has already been made of poets such as René Dépestre who have adopted new homelands for ideological reasons, but many have fled the oppressive Haitian political regime to settle in the United States and Canada, particularly francophone Québec. There is a strong Haitian community in Montréal, for

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'''See Louise Bennett's humorous account of this in "Colonization in Reverse."

instance, and many of its members publish their creative and critical work in that city. It might be supposed that there will be some regrouping of the diaspora back in Haiti now that "Baby Doc" has fallen from power, but the situation is volatile and unpredictable, as Haitian history always has been.

Puerto Rican immigration into the United States, beginning in the 1950s, has also been on a major scale. Today, American-born chicanos are beginning to write in English, rather than Spanish, but their poetry still reflects an experience of exile and displacement. Julio Marzán's "Graduation Day, 1965" dwells upon this theme:

> ...And often in the nightflights of nine years
> You returned to your childhood in that land,
> Green without businessmen or politics,
> To come before the image of your father,
> Home from the canes with eyes bloodshot,
> Angry for no reason,
> Unbuckling his belt to hit you many times
> Before you woke up to the screeching of the El,
> The mice clinging to the blanket....
> Here where the air corrodes his anguish,
> Where his faded image
> Translates into nonsense,
> Seriously your life adjusts its tie and weighs
> The advantages of accounting, of R.O.T.C.
> Today a small state college on Long Island
> Has offered you a scholarship
> And the past is a stranger calling from a pier
> Drowned out by the winds and a promise.'''

The burgeoning of contemporary Caribbean oral literature and the ever-growing Caribbean diaspora might seem to give "contradictory omens," in Edward Brathwaite's phrase, as to the future of Caribbean culture. It does

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''' Julio Marzán, ed., Inventing a Word: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Puerto Rican Poetry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 133-135.

appear, however, that the diaspora, far from weakening or diluting Antillean culture, actually functions as a means of propagating or popularizing that culture in foreign societies. Perhaps thirty five years ago, no-one living outside the islands themselves had heard of reggae music or "dub" poetry, but today it is an internationally known and imitated phenomenon. Finally, the tables have turned, and Caribbean literature is acting as a "source" rather than a "target" within the literary polysystem. In Britain, for example, non-West Indian pop groups such as the well-known "10CC," and "Dexy's Midnight Runners," perform reggae music and even use "nation language" in their songs. Moreover, dub performers have created an audience in North America and Europe, as well as in the Caribbean, actually willing and eager to listen to poetry, a situation quite opposite to that which, for instance, Orwell found in Britain in the 1950s, when, he claimed, the mention of the word "poetry" would disperse a crowd of English working people quicker than riot police hosepipes.

The renaissance of oral poetry, particularly in Jamaica and Trinidad, over the past twenty years is, to some extent, a reflection of the oral and visual nature of Western popular culture, including that broadcast by media such as cinema, television, radio, popular music, and, most recently, music videos. In Marshall McLuhan's words, we are living in a "post-literate" world. Yet, McLuhan's rash generalizations about the distinction between "typographic"

and "auditory" man, between "literate" and "non-literate" societies, are not really valid. In fact, his descriptions of "non-literate" societies are reminiscent of Léopold Sedar Senghor's romantic mythologizing of négritude:

> Until writing was invented, we lived in acoustic space, where all backward peoples still live: boundless, directionless, horizonless, the dark of the mind, the world of emotion, primordial intuition...'[2]

> The African negro...lives in a primordial night, and does not distinguish himself, to begin with, from the object...The African negro is pure sensory field...he lives a communal life with the Other, and in sym-biosis with it...The reason of classical Europe is analytic through utilization, the reason of the African negro, intuitive through participation.'[3]

Contemporary oral poetry from the West Indies patently does not emanate from such an idealized "primitive" society and culture, nor can it be regarded as "post-literate," since it co-exists and interacts with a scribal literature.

Conversely, Ruth Finnegan contends that there is nothing which "radically distinguishes (oral poetry) from written poetry in nature, composition, style, social context or function."[4] It is perhaps significant that she does not discuss Caribbean oral poetry at all in her study, for we have seen that there has existed a chasm between "folk" and scribal poetry which is only now being bridged. Moreover, in composition (improvization or memorization versus writing

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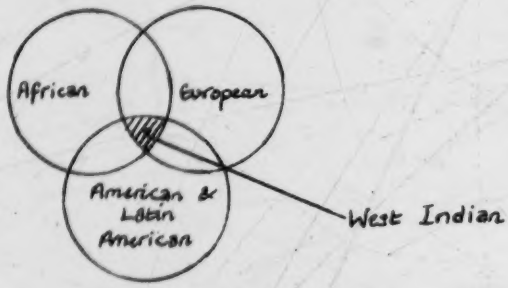
[2]Marshall McLuhan, Counterblast (London: Rapp and Whiting, 1970), pp. 13-14.
[3]Léopold Sedar Senghor, "On Négritude: Psychology of the African Negro."
[4]Ruth Finnegan, Oral Poetry: its Nature, Significance, and Social Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 272.

and revising), style (flexibly rhythmic versus pentametric, and so on), social context (folk versus elite), and function (social gatherings versus private reading), these two traditions have differed fundamentally. Only in nature do they coalesce: both stem from creative impulses, rely upon individual artists, express human preoccupations, use imagery and rhetorical devices, "give form to the formless."

IX. Chapter 9: Conclusion

Throughout their history, the West Indies have been a crossroads where three distinct cultures: African, American, and European, have come into contact and, often, conflict. The literary history of the area shows that, after centuries of changing allegiances with one or another of these three broad source literatures, West Indian literature in the later twentieth century forms a separate entity. Again, the situation can best be visualised by means of a Venn diagram:



Despite its hybridity, Caribbean literature is now by no means a peripheral or parasitic sub-system within these larger poly-systems. The various stages in the development of Caribbean poetry outlined in this history have shown a gradual progress towards self-consciousness and relative independence. Both in form and theme, the poetry has traced a course from mimicry and exoticism towards addressing the central problems of Antillean existence, such as history and identity, using local forms like calypso, which are

Caribbean *sui generis*. Moreover, this growth has also been reflected in, and fostered by, the development of West Indian literary criticism and translation projects.

A brief review of the dominant themes and poetic modes of Caribbean poetry over the centuries reveals the unity of the various countries' literary experience. During the early years of European colonization, prose histories and diaries written by explorers and expatriates were the dominant genres, soon followed by epic poetry. The European authors of these works sought to describe (usually with exaggerated poetic licence) the New World for a European audience hungry for the unusual and the exotic. Side by side with these scribal works, the folk traditions of the West Indies began to be established, with the importation of European and African oral literatures and their subsequent shaping to new circumstances. Slave culture was gradually formed in the unpropitious atmosphere of the plantation, while the masters continued to write histories and pamphlets for European consumption. Native-born West Indians began to produce their own scribal literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but, following the example of the expatriates, they contented themselves with imitating the dominant European modes in poetry, such as the formal ode, epic, or pastoral. Nevertheless, thematically, these poets strayed from the European norm by writing patriotic verse in praise of their homelands, though such verse, by nature, had to be somewhat formulaic and artificial. The advent of

Romanticism intensified the patriotic themes, and embellished them with descriptions of the native landscape, inevitably idyllic. Although the Romantic movement produced several individual poets of undoubted originality, the greater part of Antillean Romantic poetry still pandered to a lingering European dream of the exotic, paradisical islands. At the turn of the century, hispanic modernismo heralded the beginning of a series of new, primary literary currents. The series culminated in the poetry of négritude, which altered the course of Caribbean literature profoundly and permanently. The mechanism of these changes can be explained by reference to the polysysten theory of literature, which had its origins, as already mentioned, in the Russian Formalists' ideas about literary history. Itamar Even-Zohar quotes Viktor Sklovsky's explanation of literary change:

> When the 'canonized' art form (i.e., that which occupies the center of the literary system -- I. E.-Z.) reaches an impasse, the way is open for the infiltration of the elements of non-canonized art, which by this time have managed to evolve new artistic devices.'''

The phenomena of modernismo, Négritude, the avant garde, and the new orality of contemporary Caribbean literature, are all amenable to explanation by this method. Contemporary literature, especially, has been infiltrated by hitherto non-canonized oral forms, effecting a radical change in the polysystem. All of these new movements transformed both the

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'''Quoted by Itamar Even-Zohar in "The Function of the Literary Polysystem in the History of Literature," Papers in Historical Poetics (Tel Aviv University, 1978), p. 11.

form and content of Caribbean poetry, achieving extraordinary diversity where before there had been relative uniformity and conformity. Subsequent developments have fostered this diversity, and the current literary atmosphere is one of self-assured experimentation.

Caribbean literature up to the turn of the twentieth century can be described as a "defective polysystem," in Even-Zohar's terms. He gives Hebrew literature as an example of such a system, since it:

> consisted only of a canonized system, while the non-canonized one was either totally missing or fulfilled by other literatures (namely, Yiddish). When the non-canonized system was totally missing, one could observe a kind of literary sterilization. Hebrew literature became heavy, highly learned, with little if any attention being paid to the potential or real public.'''

Eighteenth and nineteenth century Caribbean literature was, on the whole, similarly "defective" in that there was virtually no interaction with non-canonized systems, and the reading public was a very tiny proportion of the population, with limited horizons of expectation. Although it did not become "highly learned," as was the case with Hebrew literature, one can certainly speak of a kind of "literary sterilization."

Behind the broad stages of literary evolution lie many undeniable differences among the various individual nations. The early history of these islands is much more uniform than twentieth century developments, in which Haiti, for

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'''Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Relations between Primary and Secondary Systems in the Literary Polysystem," Papers in Historical Poetics (Tel Aviv University, 1978), p. 18.

instance, has suffered under a right-wing dictatorship, while Cuba is a Marxist state. Emigration from the islands has progressed on a much larger scale than ever before, and the literature of the West Indian diaspora now forms a considerable body of work, exhibiting obvious cross-linguistic similarities.

A study of this diaspora literature is one of the many areas in the neglected field of Caribbean letters which demand the attention of the literary scholar. Even more urgent is the need for a comprehensive comparative history of West Indian literature, which would include consideration of prose, drama, essays, criticism, and translations, as well as poetry. On a smaller scale, there is scope for studies of women writers of the Antilles, who have been virtually ignored until recently, and for detailed examinations of dialect and folk literature. Finally, Third World scholars might turn their attention to this region in order to write a comparative history of Caribbean literature in the context of the Third World, particularly Africa and Latin America, so that the European bias of most literary scholarship might be counteracted, and new paradigms formulated.

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